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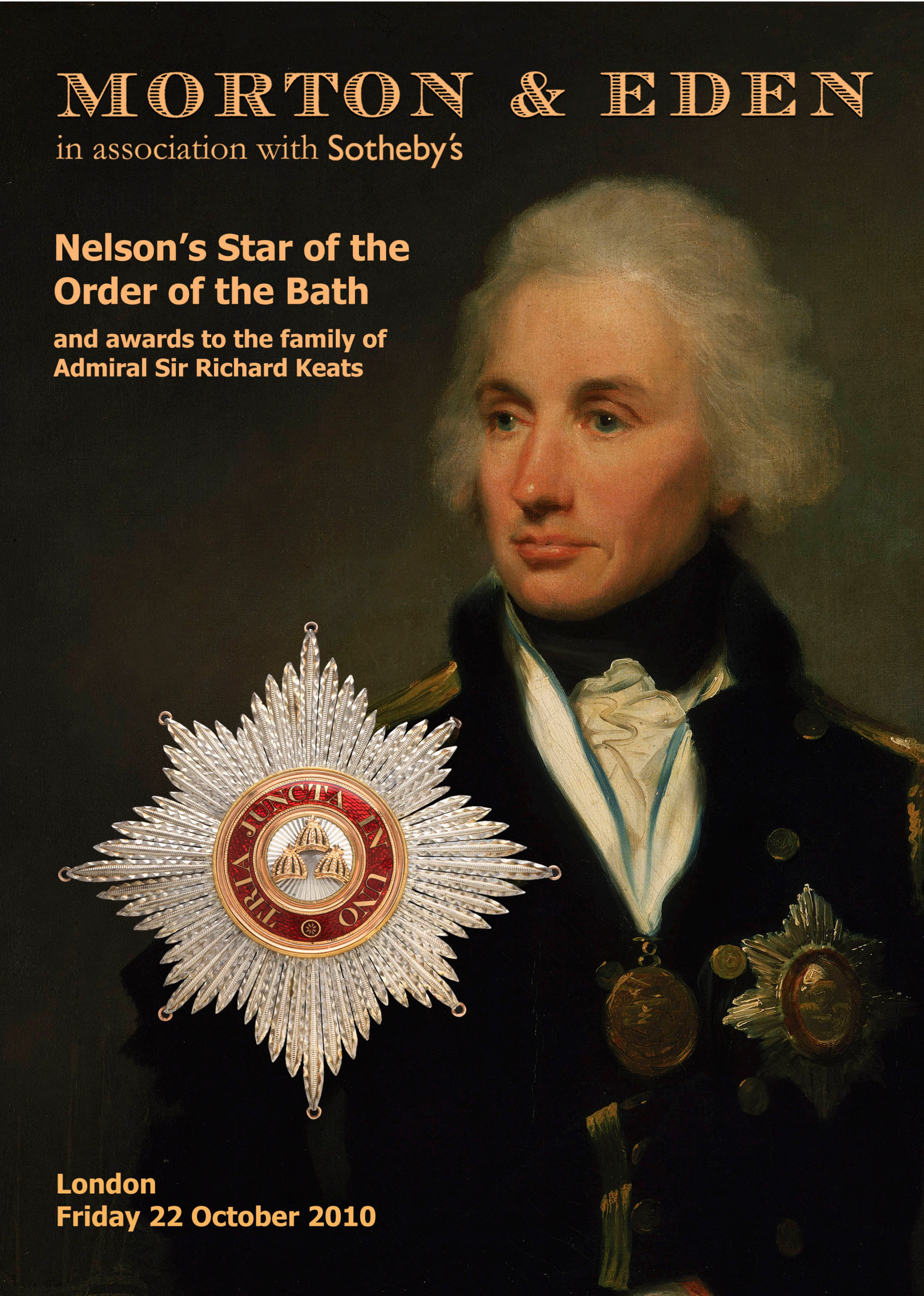
Nelson's Star of the Order of the Bath

and awards to the family of Admiral Sir Richard Keats



London
Friday 22 October 2010

Nelson's Star of the Order of the Bath

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Front: Lot 1 on Nelson's portrait by Abbott © NMM
Back: Detail from lot 1
Inside covers: Nicholas Pocock, *Agamemnon, Vanguard, Elephant, Captain* and *Victory* © NMM

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The Star of
VICE ADMIRAL
Lord Viscount Nelson
Duke of Bronté KB &c&c.
Who fell in his last
GLORIOUS VICTORY
off Cape Trafalgar the
21 October 1805.
Presented to Vice Admiral Sir
Richard Goodwin Keats by
EARL NELSON
24th March
1814.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the death of Horatio Nelson aboard H.M.S. *VICTORY,* relics of his life have been revered, displayed and keenly collected. It is remarkable that his Star of the Order of the Bath should have emerged almost two hundred years after it was given to Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats by Nelson's brother William, 1st Earl Nelson.

The award of the K.B. in 1797 followed Commodore Nelson's contribution to the successful outcome of the Battle of Cape St Vincent. It was the first of many honours and accolades which he was to receive and of which he was intensely proud. This magnificent precious metal star must have been commissioned by Nelson shortly after the knighthood was confirmed, before the actual investiture by King George III in September 1797. It would have been reserved for more formal wear and occasions such as portrait sittings; for everyday use, in the manner of the time, cloth and bullion versions were displayed on his day uniforms and coats. At Trafalgar Nelson famously refused advice to cover his four order stars - including the Bath - during the battle. It has often been said that his conspicuous appearance on the deck of the *VICTORY* led to the fatal wound, from a bullet fired from the rigging by a French marksman. In their biography published in 1809 Clarke and McArthur wrote of the 'Trafalgar Coat':

> 'The various splendid honours he had received from different Nations, were plainly worked upon it, and the Star of the Order of the Bath which he had always worn with a peculiar pleasure, as the free gift of his Sovereign, he resolved should appear in the Battle, and be nearest his heart when he fell: "In honour," he exclaimed, "I gained them, and in honour I will die in them." ' (Clarke & McArthur, vol II, p 442).

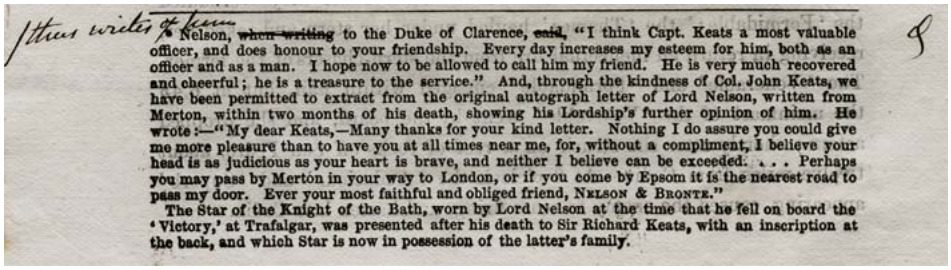
Still bearing the same four embroidered stars, the coat is today displayed at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. After being in the possession of Emma Hamilton it was acquired by Prince Albert for the nation and it survived the notorious theft of Nelson relics from the Painted Hall, Greenwich Hospital during the weekend of 9/10 December 1900. Apart from Nelson's watch and fob seal none of the stolen items, which included the majority of Nelson's orders and his three large Naval Gold Medals, has ever been recovered.

The intricate sequence of events following what *The Sphere* called 'a particularly despicable outrage on the nation' has been the subject of recent detailed research (Cross, Anthony, *An Offence Against the Nation…* , 2003 and 2006, and Prentice, Rina, *The Authentic Nelson,* 2005). The main perpetrator, William Carter, was sentenced to seven years penal servitude in 1904; further investigations by Detective Inspector Arrow elicited the name of Alf Sutton of Islington as his likely accomplice and possible 'fence', but after that the trail grew cold. Most commentators have presumed that the medals must have been melted down and lost but Arrow himself, in his memoirs published in 1926, was more optimistic:

> '… I do not believe it. I believe that the man who stole them had a market for them maybe in England, but more likely in America.'

The peculiar circumstances of the robbery mean that very few original pieces of Nelson's insignia survive. The K.B. Star offered in this sale is probably the *only* such piece which is still in private hands and which is ever likely to appear for sale. The

accompanying letter from William, 1st Earl Nelson, which affirms his gift of the star to Admiral Sir Richard Keats, K.B. in 1814, has never previously been recorded. The gift was obviously made well before Lady Charlotte Hood (1787-1873), daughter of William, 1st Earl Nelson, inherited the rest of Nelson's orders and medals with the Dukedom of Bronte in 1835, on the death of her father.



Letters written by him

Nelson, ~~when writing~~ to the Duke of Clarence, ~~said~~, "I think Capt. Keats a most valuable officer, and does honour to your friendship. Every day increases my esteem for him, both as an officer and as a man. I hope now to be allowed to call him my friend. He is very much recovered and cheerful; he is a treasure to the service." And, through the kindness of Col. John Keats, we have been permitted to extract from the original autograph letter of Lord Nelson, written from Merton, within two months of his death, showing his Lordship's further opinion of him. He wrote:—"My dear Keats,—Many thanks for your kind letter. Nothing I do assure you could give me more pleasure than to have you at all times near me, for, without a compliment, I believe your head is as judicious as your heart is brave, and neither I believe can be exceeded. . . . Perhaps you may pass by Merton in your way to London, or if you come by Epsom it is the nearest road to pass my door. Ever your most faithful and obliged friend, NELSON & BRONTE."

The Star of the Knight of the Bath, worn by Lord Nelson at the time that he fell on board the 'Victory,' at Trafalgar, was presented after his death to Sir Richard Keats, with an inscription at the back, and which Star is now in possession of the latter's family.

Note from a biography of Sir Richard Keats in *The Shipwrecked Mariner,* January 1868
From Keats Family Papers

Apart from an oblique (and slightly inaccurate) reference in *The Shipwrecked Mariner,* the survival of the star seems to have passed unremarked until now. Both star and letter have been preserved in excellent condition by several generations of the descendants of Sir Richard Keats. The sale also includes Sir Richard's watch (presented to him by Prince Edward) and his own G.C.B., as well as campaign medals awarded to his nephew and great-nephew.

The full insignia of a Knight Companion of the Order of the Bath comprised a gold and enamel Collar and Collar Badge for use on ceremonial occasions as well as the Star and Sash which could be worn at any time. Nelson's collar was retained by the Hood family and was used by Lady Charlotte's son General Alexander Nelson Hood, 1st Viscount Bridport when he was created G.C.B. in 1891. It still survives, having been presented to a private institution by 'a group of friends' in 1932. Nelson's collar badge, clearly visible in contemporary photographs, was amongst the Nelson relics consigned by Viscount Bridport to Christie's for auction on 12 July 1895. With eleven other orders and medals it was acquired on behalf of the nation in a private sale which was arranged shortly before the auction was due to take place. The group, lots 176 to 186, included an added lot 180a - a 'Cross of [the Order of St Joachim] Always worn by Nelson on his ordinary Service coat' - and the purchase price was £2,500. The use of public funds for such a purpose was unprecedented at the time and the pieces were placed on public display alongside other Nelson relics in the Painted Hall, Greenwich. Almost all, including Nelson's Bath badge, disappeared in the 1900 burglary.

The circumstances under which this highly important Star, valuable even in 1814, was presented to Sir Richard Keats have revealed fresh information concerning the deep friendship between Keats and Horatio Nelson as well as Keats's patronage aboard H.M.S. *SUPERB* of Charles Nelson, the young cousin of Horatio and William.

We are indebted to Stephen Wood MA FSA for his original research, insight and valuable contributions throughout this catalogue.

Morton and Eden

Nelson's decorations *(K.B. badge, upper centre)* photographed for Viscount Bridport, *circa* 1889

'A GLORIOUS AND BRILLIANT VICTORY'

NELSON AND THE BATTLE OF CAPE ST VINCENT

Nelson's 'Patent Bridge' for boarding First Rates

Commodore Nelson's knighthood in what Colin White called his 'Year of Destiny', and his consequent ownership of this magnificent Star of the Order of the Bath, followed his extraordinary contribution to Sir John Jervis's great victory over a Spanish fleet on 14 February 1797.

By this time Britain had been at war with Revolutionary France for four years. In October 1796 Spain had changed sides and had become an ally of France, thereby shifting the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean considerably and necessitating the virtual evacuation of that sea by British naval and military units. Whilst Spain had been an ally British ships could, and did, blockade the great French naval base of Toulon with impunity; after she became an enemy British ships risked being caught between the numerically powerful fleets of two nations. While the French navy still commanded little respect, its officer corps having yet to recover fully from evisceration by Revolutionary ardour, the same could not be said for the Spanish navy which, as N.A.M. Rodger has said, '…reached its apogee in the mid-1790s.' (Rodger, 2004, p 379). Although Spanish naval ship-building peaked in that decade, resulting in some very fine, large and robust ships, this advantage was countered by low levels of competence and poor discipline. These standards were regarded as lamentable by officers such as Jervis and Nelson who had witnessed them when Spain had been an ally (Knight, p 204). The few actions fought by British ships against those of Spain between October 1796 and February 1797 had done little to change the minds of British officers about the fighting capacities of their new enemy and so, in anticipation of a major fleet action with the Spanish navy, British morale was high and Jervis's ships' companies were spoiling for a fight.

Commodore Horatio Nelson was characteristically bellicose. Having been closely involved in the hasty departure of British ships from their shore bases in the Mediterranean, he raged about its implications in a much-quoted letter to his wife of 17 October 1796:

> '...I lament our present orders [to evacuate the Mediterranean] in sackcloth and ashes, so dishonourable to the dignity of England, whose Fleets are equal to meet the World in arms; and of all the Fleets I ever saw, I never beheld one in point of officers and men equal to Sir John Jervis's, who is a Commander-in-Chief able to lead them to glory.' (Nicolas, II, p 291).

Nelson's pugnacity was heightened in December 1796 when he was forced to relinquish a Spanish prize and came close to experiencing the questionable delights of a Spanish prison. Following the capture of two Spanish frigates by two ships under his command, H.M.S.s *BLANCHE* (32) and *LA MINERVE* (44), the subsequent appearance of a large Spanish squadron obliged Nelson to abandon his prizes and their prize crews, and the two British frigates had to make a run for it. Nelson was again forced to run from a superior Spanish force on 11 February when he was chased westwards by two Spanish men-of-war through the Strait of Gibraltar in *LA MINERVE*, in which he flew his commodore's broad pendant although the ship was commanded by Captain George Cockburn. The chase became part of the Nelson legend when John Drinkwater, later to record the Battle of Cape St Vincent in his *Narrative* in terms so favourable to Nelson, embellished the reality with more than a little romance. According to Drinkwater, *LA MINERVE* lost a seaman overboard while being pursued by the Spanish ships and Lieutenant T.M. Hardy, with a 'party of sailors', lowered the jolly boat to try to rescue the man who was being swept rapidly astern towards the oncoming Spaniards. Finding no trace of him, Hardy and the boat's crew attempted to return to *LA MINERVE* but struggled against the strong current in the Strait. Despite the oncoming Spanish ships Nelson ordered Cockburn to slow *LA MINERVE's* progress, reportedly saying 'by God, I'll not lose Hardy, back the mizzen topsail'. The ship drifted back towards the jolly boat, which was recovered safely, whereupon all sail was made and the frigate rapidly out-sailed its pursuers. As Roger Knight has observed 'At this point in Nelson's career myths began to take hold' (Knight, p 218), and the reality of this particular chase, which is soberly told in Knight's magisterial biography of Nelson, is naturally rather more prosaic.

What is beyond dispute, however, is that Nelson had twice been chased, and twice required to run, by superior Spanish forces within a two-month period. For someone like Nelson, so imbued with patriotism, contempt for his country's enemies, frustration with the pusillanimity of some of his superiors and indubitable ambition, this only
served to heighten his natural aggression. That aggression and ambition were to be given free rein on 14 February 1797.

Nelson arrived with Jervis's fleet by noon on 13 February, having passed through the Spanish fleet in the darkness of the previous night. The two fleets were converging off Cape St Vincent. The Spanish were outward bound for South America, protecting some mercury-laden transports and anxious to avoid battle; the British were eager to engage them and to achieve a victory that would do much to improve morale at home. Jervis was aware of the proximity of the Spanish but their fleet was not sighted until early in the morning of 14 February. By this time Nelson had hoisted his broad pendant in H.M.S. *CAPTAIN* (74) which Jervis had stationed in the rear division of the British fleet. By mid-morning the two fleets were fully in sight of each other and the disparities between their number, size and sailing discipline became apparent. The Spanish fleet comprised twenty-two ships of the line, 'some of them the biggest in the world, massively built of hardwoods from Spain's empire' (Knight, pp 221 and 222n). Against these colossi Jervis had fifteen line-of-battle warships, most of them third-rates of 74 guns; both fleets of course also included frigates and smaller craft whose function was not to trade broadsides in a fleet action.

At 10.57am Jervis signalled for line of battle to be formed and the British fleet headed like an arrow, at an obtuse angle, for the centre of the loosely grouped clusters of Spanish ships. The Spanish attempted, with conspicuous confusion, to form some sort of defence against this rapidly approaching British attack. At 11.30am, the head of the British line formed by H.M.S. *CULLODEN* (74), Captain Thomas Troubridge, sailed through a gap in the centre of the Spanish fleet, *CULLODEN* raking the stern of a Spanish three-decker as she passed. As the two fleets converged a general fire – at varying ranges – was exchanged, although the Spanish ships were so deployed that they were unable to bring the maximum potential weight of their guns to bear. By the time the British van was through the gap in the Spanish fleet, Jervis signalled to his fleet to tack in succession, a manoeuvre that would bring the two fleets on parallel or converging tacks. The British would have the weather gauge and so be better able to dictate the battle that Jervis wanted: to roll up the rear of the fleet, if possible by 'doubling' the Spanish ships (attacking them from both sides simultaneously).

The British van obeyed this signal and raced after the retreating Spaniards but the centre and rear divisions of the line were delayed by a short running fight with a group of Spanish warships to leeward and, after that had ended, by a shift in the wind. This meant that the British van, comprising only five ships, was gaining on seventeen Spanish ships and was in danger of being overwhelmed by them whilst unsupported by the rest of the British fleet. By noon the British van was in range of the Spanish. Being closer to the Spanish fleet than Jervis, whose vision of distant events was obscured by smoke from a recent engagement, Nelson could see that the British van was in danger and that the Spanish still represented a real threat, particularly if they were able to join forces with the other Spanish ships to leeward.

At 12.50pm Nelson gave the order for H.M.S. *CAPTAIN* to wear out of line and to head for the British van. In doing this he was not disobeying orders in the manner which has sometimes been suggested; he was rather using his initiative in interpreting Jervis's latest signals. Jervis had just signalled, initially, to his ships astern of the flagship to tack in succession in order to reinforce the van and then, immediately afterwards, by flying signal 41:

> 'The ships to take suitable station for their mutual support and to engage the enemy as arriving up with them in succession.' (Knight, p 223).

Jervis was famously aware of the foolishness of too rigidly adhering to 'tactics' and rules of engagement in sea battles and welcomed initiative, especially if it got results; Nelson certainly knew this. By wearing ship, Nelson was able to bring H.M.S. *CAPTAIN* into action far faster than by tacking her but even so – and despite his somewhat exaggerated accounts of how quickly *CAPTAIN* joined the battle – the leading ships of the British van were engaged before *CAPTAIN* was able to join them, some thirty minutes after changing her course in order to do so (Palmer, p 42).

H.M.S. *CAPTAIN* opened fire at extreme range, her guns firing as they bore upon the vast Spanish flagship *SANTISSIMA TRINIDAD*, the largest ship in the world at the time and mounting 120 guns. In effect Nelson cut across the bows of the Spanish fleet, thereby halting its flight and, together with the other ships in the British van, bringing it to a battle that Knight calls '…a close-quarter mêlée, with crews striving at a desperate pace to load and fire their guns as quickly as possible…' (Knight, p 223). By 2pm, when Jervis made the signal for close action, the majority of the British fleet had caught up with the van; ten minutes later he signalled H.M.S. *EXCELLENT* (74), Captain Cuthbert Collingwood, to forge ahead and to assist Nelson by breaking the Spanish line. By 2.45pm the first Spanish ship had struck her colours and by 3pm a second had joined her in surrendering.

Nelson, with Berry, boarding the *SAN JOSE*

It was in this final stage of the battle that Nelson took the action which gained him lasting fame. Wearing out of the line of battle had been done before but Nelson's next exploit had never previously been attempted. After being heavily engaged for about ninety minutes, H.M.S. *CAPTAIN* had sustained severe damage to her rigging, had lost her fore topmast and had her wheel shot away. She was alongside the 84-gun *SAN NICOLAS* and still heavily engaged with her when Collingwood, in H.M.S. *EXCELLENT*, passed very close to the Spanish ship and poured a rolling broadside into her before pressing on to attack the Spanish flagship. Collingwood's broadside staggered *SAN NICOLAS*, causing her to luff and to collide with the 112-gun *SAN JOSE*, herself badly damaged. Nelson seized his opportunity, ordering 1st Lieutenant Edward Berry to secure *CAPTAIN* to *SAN NICOLAS*. As Berry did

so Nelson gathered a boarding party of sailors and soldiers of 69th Regiment of Foot, serving on *CAPTAIN* as marines, and boarded *SAN NICOLAS* through her smashed stern cabin windows. This boarding party rushed the Spanish quarterdeck from her stern while Berry – who had been first aboard the Spaniard with another boarding party – fought his way aft from her bow; Spanish resistance was brief. Realising that a further prize was there for the taking, Nelson led his boarding party, by now reinforced by his loyal bodyguard of boat's crew from H.M.S. *AGAMEMNON*, across to the quarterdeck of *SAN JOSE*, where resistance proved negligible. In the space of no more than twenty minutes Nelson and his men had captured two large Spanish warships, using one – as popular accounts of the event in Britain were to term it – as his 'Patent Bridge' for boarding the other. Although both ships were indeed boarded and captured by Nelson and his men, the Spaniards were ripe for the taking having sustained considerable damage from other British ships.

In capturing two Spanish ships, Nelson and his boarding parties were responsible for a half of the prizes taken at Cape St Vincent. The victory was one that Britain sorely needed and the nation's rewards were generous. Jervis was created Earl St Vincent, two of his subordinate admirals received baronetcies, and Nelson was made a Knight Companion of the Order of the Bath.

On the day after the battle Nelson was discussing the question of honours with Colonel Drinkwater who, together with Sir Gilbert Elliot, had rather unexpectedly been present to witness his daring triumph. Rebuffing with feeling Drinkwater's initial speculation regarding a baronetcy (which would have been expensive and socially burdensome), Nelson much preferred Drinkwater's next suggestion of the Bath:

> 'Yes, if my services have been of any value, let them be noticed in a way that the public may know me, or them'. (Nicolas, II, p 348).

Nelson wrote to Elliot without delay, aware that he and Drinkwater were imminently leaving for England aboard the *LIVELY* to report on the outcome of the battle. Already an accomplished self-publicist, he asked Elliot to make it known that (at this time, at least) he had no desire for an hereditary title but, in a clear reference to the Bath:

> '… other Honours, which die with the Possessor … I should be proud to accept, if my efforts are thought worthy by my King'. (Nicolas II, p 351).

Nelson's hopes were fulfilled. His award of the Bath was confirmed in a letter from the Admiralty dated 17 March 1797, by which time Nelson had become a Rear-Admiral as the result of a regular promotion.

> 'I have His Majesty's commands to acquaint you, that in order to mark his Royal approbation of your successful and gallant exertions on several occasions during the course of the present War in the Mediterranean, and more particularly of your very distinguished conduct in the glorious and brilliant Victory obtained over the Fleet of Spain by His Majesty's Fleet, under the command of Admiral Sir John Jervis on the 14th of February last'.

In June the Duke of Portland wrote to the newly-created Earl of St Vincent with the King's further instructions:

> 'to nominate him [Nelson] to be one of the Knights Companions of the most Honourable Order of the Bath, and it being necessary that he should be invested with the ensigns of the said order which are transmitted to him by this opportunity I am to signify to your Lordship the Kings pleasure that you should perform that ceremony'.

In the event Nelson's voyage to Tenerife and the loss of his arm at Santa Cruz meant that the intended on-board ceremony, which would have created a precedent, never took place. Instead, he was invested by King George III on 27 September 1797 at St James's Palace, when the King observed that Nelson had lost his right arm. Nelson is said to have replied: 'but not my right hand, as I have the honour of presenting Captain Berry to you; and besides, may it please Your Majesty, I can never think that a loss which the performance of my duty has occasioned; and so long as I have a foot to stand on, I will combat for my King and Country' (Nicolas II, p 448). The King's retort was: 'But your country has a claim for a bit more of you'. (Knight, p 257).

For Nelson it was crucial that the Crown should bear the cost of his K.B. which, in his case, amounted to the substantial sum of £428 7s 5d; this included £7 13s for a 'Warrant for Dispensation for wearing the Star'. The star was, of course, a highly visible mark of distinction of exactly the type which Nelson craved and which, whether in its metal or cloth form, he was to wear at every opportunity. As Drinkwater later wrote:

> 'To him medals and ribbons were no trivial baubles, but badges of bravery, earned distinctions unavailable to mere men of birth'. (Drinkwater 1840).

His installation in May 1803 was by proxy, hastily arranged because Nelson had been called away suddenly on the resumption of hostilities. By then he himself had deputised for the King in bestowing the Order of the Bath at sea, using his Egyptian Club sword to knight Admiral Sir Thomas Graves aboard H.M.S. *ST. GEORGE* following the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801.

As with so many events in Nelson's life and career, his actions at Cape St Vincent on 14 February 1797, as well as his means of ensuring that his was the first account of the battle to be read by the King, and even his knighthood have attracted different interpretations and reactions ever since that bloody St Valentine's Day more than two centuries ago. What is undisputed, however, is the tangible recognition by his King of Nelson's actions at Cape St Vincent, epitomised by the superb star now offered for sale.

'YOUR HEAD IS AS JUDICIOUS AS YOUR HEART IS BRAVE'

THE LIFE AND CAREER OF ADMIRAL SIR RICHARD GOODWIN KEATS G.C.B. (1757-1834)

Richard Goodwin Keats was born in Chalton, Hampshire, on 16 January 1757. Like Nelson, he was the son of a parson, being the second child and eldest surviving son of The Reverend Richard Keats (1731-1812) and his wife Elizabeth, *née* Brookes. At the time of his birth, his father was curate of the parish of Chalton, about ten miles north of Portsmouth.

Keats received what Ralfe has described as 'the first rudiments of his education' at the hands of his father but, in 1766, was sent to New College School in Oxford and then entered Winchester College in 1768.[1] All his subsequent biographers have copied Ralfe's comments on Keats's feelings about what Winchester required of him and his resultant propensity for a naval life – comments which Ralfe had copied from a manuscript memoir written by Keats:

> 'Being little addicted to study at that age [I] embraced an opportunity of going to Sea under the Patronage of the Earl of Halifax.' [2]

In 1770, when Keats embraced this opportunity, the Earl of Halifax was Lord Privy Seal in Lord North's government and his kinsman, John Montagu, was captain of H.M.S. *BELLONA* (74), then serving as a guard-ship at Portsmouth. The 'Patronage' to which Keats referred was a means of providing for the worthy by the great that permeated the age and which was widely employed and accepted by all, Nelson and Keats included. The records disagree about the exact date of Keats's entry on board *BELLONA* – it was either 21 October, 25 October or 25 November – but all agree that the year was 1770 and that the young Keats, possessed of the rudiments of education and able to write a legible hand, was aged thirteen: he was rated able and remained in that rate during the one month and four days that he spent at Portsmouth on board the guard-ship.[3]

N.A.M. Rodger has stated that, 'It may be taken as axiomatic that a first-born son in the Navy must have come from an impoverished family.' [4] Although not the first-born, Richard Goodwin Keats was the eldest surviving son of a family with pretensions to gentility but little money. When knighted in 1808, Keats was able to refer a genealogist to existing arms, of both the Keats and Goodwin families, to which his father claimed a right through his paternity. However, his younger brother, William, was unable to aim higher than a second-lieutenancy of Marines in 1780 and spent thirteen years in that rank before being promoted: William Keats's lieutenancy of Marines may, itself, have been the result of patronage. If Richard Goodwin Keats was to make his way, it would be by talent, luck and, inevitably, a little patronage: in this, he was little different from his slightly younger contemporary, Horatio Nelson.

Keats's first captain, John Montagu (1718/19-95) was well connected. Aside from his relationship to the Earl of Halifax, he was also cousin to another John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich (1718-92) – N.A.M. Rodger's 'Insatiable Earl', a member of the Board of Admiralty 1744-51 and First Lord 1748-51, 1763 and 1771-82, in the last term of which office he worked with Captain Maurice Suckling (1725-78), Controller of the Navy and Head of the Navy Board 1775-78 and, perhaps more famously, uncle to Horatio Nelson: Suckling had taken the twelve-year old Nelson to sea in 1771. At a time when the careers of young naval officers were frequently influenced by the success of their patrons, and when senior naval officers usually had 'families' or 'followers' of young men whose careers they promoted, Keats's early career was to owe a great deal to the Montagu family: he largely learned his trade under the Montagus, serving between 1770 and 1777 under John Montagu as he progressed from captain to admiral, as well as under his two naval-captain sons, George (1750-1829) and James (1752-94).

After a month on H.M.S. *BELLONA*, late in November 1770, Keats was transferred to another guard-ship, H.M.S. *YARMOUTH* (64) where he was rated midshipman. Early the following year, his ship was ordered to sail to Gibraltar with troops on board but found to be unfit for the passage and paid off at Plymouth, whereupon Keats was transferred to another guard-ship, H.M.S. *CAMBRIDGE* (80), based at Plymouth and in which he continued to be rated midshipman.[5] He left *CAMBRIDGE* in April 1771 and was unemployed for two months until, in June 1771, he was swept up in the 'family' of John Montagu, by then a rear admiral and commander-in-chief on the North American station, rated able and appointed to H.M.S. *CAPTAIN* (74), Montagu's flagship and the predecessor in that name of the ship from which Nelson leapt, literally, to fame at the Battle of Cape St Vincent in 1797.

For the next six years, until he passed for lieutenant in April 1777, Keats was employed in North American waters. He served on Montagu's flagship until December 1772, then as an able seaman on the schooner H.M.S. *HALIFAX* (10) for five months before returning, and being rated midshipman, to the flagship for thirteen months and then, also as a midshipman, moving to the sloop H.M.S. *KINGFISHER* (14), Captain James Montagu, from May 1774 to February 1776. It was probably this service on comparatively small craft in his formative years that gave Keats his notable navigational skill and ship-handling ability in shallow waters; his first experience of active service – in the early years of the American War for Independence – gave him more useful experience, particularly in the area of combined operations. A midshipman aboard *KINGFISHER* on the outbreak of the American War in 1775, Keats was rated master's mate and taken onboard H.M.S. *MERCURY* (20) by James Montagu in February 1776; Keats served in

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[1] Ralfe, p 487.
[2] Quoted in White, 'Keats', p 348.
[3] ADM 9/1, f.46 gives 25 October 1770; ADM 107/6, p 376, suggests 21 October; all the printed records copy Ralfe in giving 25 November 1770.
[4] Rodger, 1988, p 259.
[5] ADM 9/1, f. 46.

MERCURY for nearly a year until returning to the books of Admiral Montagu's flagship, by then H.M.S. *ROMNEY* (50), Captain George Montagu, in the rate of able seaman, on 1 February 1777.[6] In the twelve months from December 1775 to 1776, as he recorded in his memoir, he was active in operations against the American rebels:

> '[I] saw much boat service, was in several skirmishes On Shore, was present at the battle of Great Bridge in Virginia [9.12.1775], at the burning of Norfolk [1.1.1776], at the taking of New York [16.9.1776], Fort Washington [17.11.1776] and Rhode Island [December 1776].' [7]

Although on the books of H.M.S. *ROMNEY*, and not discharged until 9 April 1777, Keats was actually in London by the end of January 1777 since he was examined there for his suitability to hold the rank of lieutenant and passed on 5 February.[8] His examiners, Captains John Campbell and Abraham North, were also to examine the slightly younger Horatio Nelson, and to pass him as lieutenant, on 9th April 1777. Although Keats passed his examination two months before Nelson, their first commissions as lieutenants were both dated 10 April 1777, Keats in H.M.S. *RAMILLIES* (74), Captain Robert Digby, and Nelson in H.M.S. *LOWESTOFFE* (32), Captain William Locker.[9] Just as Locker influenced the young Nelson, so the well-connected and successful Robert Digby (1732-1814) was influential in the career of Keats. When Keats and Nelson came to know each other well, twenty-four years later, this common date of a first commission may have been one of the many things that cemented their friendship.

Keats joined *RAMILLIES* as her junior lieutenant on 10 April 1777, at which time the ship was part of the Channel Fleet. The entry of France into the American war in July 1778 resulted in the Royal Navy being ordered to attack French shipping and *RAMILLIES*, in consort with HMS *TERRIBLE* (74), had a successful cruise in the Bay of Biscay before joining Keppel's fleet, in the division commanded by Palliser, at the battle of Ushant on 27 July 1778. Although most commentators concur in describing that battle as 'indecisive' or 'inconclusive', it was nevertheless Keats's first experience of a fleet action and one in which his ship sustained casualties, although authorities disagree as to their number.[10] It can safely be inferred that Keats impressed Digby while in *RAMILLIES* since, shortly after Digby was promoted rear admiral and hoisted his flag in H.M.S. *PRINCE GEORGE* (98), on 19 March 1779, Keats joined that ship as her 5th lieutenant. While Keats had impressed Digby sufficiently for him to be invited to join the flagship, Digby had impressed the King sufficiently for him to choose Digby as the man to take his third son aboard her in order to see if the life of a sailor would suit him: in November 1778, the King had described Digby as, '…a most excellent officer, sensible, prudent and discreet…', all qualities that recommended him to the King as the governor of H.R.H. The Prince William Henry.[11]

Prince William Henry, later Duke of Clarence and H.M. King William IV (1765-1837), was to be one of the most significant strands in the rope of connections that wove Keats and Nelson together since he was a friend and admirer of them both: he wrote to both of them about the other and they wrote to each other about him, rarely in terms of anything but friendship, if occasionally touched with concern about wellbeing and health. According to the Muster for H.M.S. *PRINCE GEORGE*, Keats joined the ship on 13 May 1779 but his service record places the date as six days later; the same Muster records Prince William joining on 14 May, a date later modified to 14 June.[12] It is clear that the naval tuition that the young prince received from the flagship's 5th lieutenant, who was promoted 4th lieutenant on 15th December 1779, stayed with him all his life and provided a foundation for the later guidance that he was to receive from Nelson. Quoted in 1823, from remarks made during the period 1807-11, he said:

> 'Excepting the naval tuition which I had received on board the Prince George, when the present Rear Admiral Keats was Lieutenant of her, and for whom both of us [The Duke of Clarence and Nelson] equally entertained a sincere regard, my mind took its first decided naval turn from this familiar intercourse with Nelson.' [13]

Although Nelson's surviving letters make no mention of this, it is possible that it was from the young prince that the then Captain Horatio Nelson received his earliest impressions of the then Commander Richard Goodwin Keats when Nelson and Prince William first met in New York in November 1782.[14] When writing to Keats's father in November 1801, the prince said that he owed 'all my professional knowledge to his son.' [15]

Keats did well during the two-and-a-half years that he served aboard H.M.S. *PRINCE GEORGE:* as well as gaining the respect and admiration of a prince, he commended himself to his seniors too and would have benefited from prize money. He experienced his second fleet action, on 16 January 1780, when Admiral Rodney's fleet – en route to the relief of the siege of Gibraltar – overwhelmed a smaller Spanish fleet off Cape St Vincent and captured six prizes, although that which struck to *PRINCE GEORGE* was subsequently lost. On the way home with the remaining prize ships, Keats's ship captured a French 64-gun ship and two French Indiamen. Returning to North American waters – where Digby had been appointed commander-in-chief – in August 1781, Keats distinguished himself the following winter in command of the naval forces in a combined operation to destroy some American vessels that had been preying upon the trade to and from New York. So successful was the operation that Keats received promotion to commander with effect from 18 January 1782 and command of the ship H.M.S. *RHINOCEROS*, which Keats described as having been 'fitted as a floating battery at New York' for the defence of that harbour.[16] Keats's first command lasted until the

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[6] ADM 9/1, f. 46.
[7] Quoted in White, 'Keats', p 348.
[8] ADM 107/6, p 376.
[9] ADM 9/1, f. 46; Knight, p 41.
[10] Ralfe, p 489, says 18; White, 'Keats', p 349, says 28.
[11] Fortescue, IV, letter 225. The King's opinion of Digby may have been influenced by the occasion when, in May 1758, Digby had put glory before profit in chasing a French warship rather than capturing the prizes she had abandoned: Rodger, 1988, p 316.
[12] ADM 36/8969; ADM 9/1, f. 46. Keats's muster number was 615, Prince William's was 641.
[13] Marshall, I, p 8.
[14] Knight, p 107.
[15] White, 'Keats', p 349, n. 9.
[16] Ralfe, p 490; quoted in White, 'Keats', p 349.

end of July 1782, by which time the American War was all but over, and on 1 August he was given command of the 16-gun sloop H.M.S. *BONETTA*.[17] It was while in command of *BONETTA* that he participated in one of the last naval engagements of the war, in September 1782. In company with H.M.S.s *LION* (64) and *VESTAL* (28), he pursued two large French frigates into the estuary of the Delaware river and up-river for some distance, acting as pilot for the larger ships and demonstrating his talent for navigation in tricky waters; eventually the larger French frigate – *L'AIGLE* said, at 40 guns, to be the largest in the French navy at the time – grounded, struck her colours and was captured; the other frigate escaped. The ending of the American War resulted in a drastic reduction in size of the Royal Navy and although Keats remained in command of *BONETTA*, based in Nova Scotia, that commission came to an end in January 1785 and he was placed on half pay.

Half pay in peacetime was the lot of naval as well as military officers: it took no account of talent and little account of status. For officers of slender means, such as Keats, or those who aspired to learn a foreign language, such as Nelson, the European continent was the natural place of escape if one was placed on half pay. The continent offered a lower cost of living and if one chose to be based no further from London than Paris then communications with Britain were good enough to ensure that one could return rapidly, should the chance of a ship arise. Nelson, when on half pay from 3 July 1783 to 18 March 1784, chose to go to St Omer to learn French; when on half pay again, from 30 November 1787 to 6 January 1793, he remained at home.[18] Keats, on half pay from 3 January 1785 to 22 October 1789, is said by most sources, who copy Ralfe, to have gone to live on the continent. However, it is unlikely that he was far from a postal service since it must be inferred that he kept in touch with Prince William, who had been created Duke of Clarence in May 1789, and possible that the next stage in his career was as a direct result of a letter of congratulations from Keats to the newly created Duke following publication of his new titles in *The London Gazette* – a publication that was required reading for all officers on half pay. In June 1789 at, it is said in most sources, 'the pressing solicitation of the Duke of Clarence with the King', he was promoted post captain: the date may be significant. If Keats was made post on 4 June, as Ralfe and those who have copied him say, then the significance of this date is simply explained and the Duke of Clarence's influence obvious: this was the King's birthday and his first since recovering from the first appearance of his illness. If the date of promotion was 24 June, as Sainsbury and Syrett/DiNardo would have it, then the date appears to have no particular significance. Whatever the date, the story of the Duke of Clarence's influence in getting his shipmate made post, shortly after the outbreak of the French Revolution and at a time of geopolitical uncertainty, is too likely not to be believed; and, if it was on the occasion of the King's birthday, that may have kept Keats's name in the King's mind when he next needed a frigate in a hurry.

Although made post in June 1789, Keats had to wait until October that year for a ship and, when she was found for him, she was far from ideal. His first captain's command was the old frigate H.M.S. *SOUTHAMPTON* (32). Launched in 1757, she was as old as her new captain, had not been docked since 1786, had grounded or struck rocks on at least three occasions and her coppered bottom was foul. Keats's representations to the Admiralty about the state of his ship met with merely a reprimand for not taking them through the proper channels and he was allotted Channel duty, based at Spithead, until January 1790 when – perhaps through the Duke of Clarence's influence or the King remembering his name when given a choice of two frigates for the job – he was hurriedly required to take the recently disgraced Prince Edward to Gibraltar, to which garrison he was being banished.

Keats returned from Gibraltar in April 1790, with a long list of complaints about the state of his ship but, with the fleet in the throes of mobilisation during the 'Nootka Sound' crisis, it is unlikely that much was done. In the event, *SOUTHAMPTON* was paid off in February 1791 and, after a short wait, Keats was appointed to H.M.S. *NIGER* (32) on 29 August that year and retained command of her, employed in the Channel and North Sea against smugglers, until April 1793, by which time Britain was at war with France and its allies, full fleet mobilisation was in progress and there was employment for naval officers again: after a long period on half pay, Nelson had been appointed to command H.M.S. *AGAMEMNON* (64) in January 1793. On 10/11 April 1793, Keats exchanged command of his frigate for that of the line-of-battle ship H.M.S. *LONDON* (98) which he was ordered to prepare to receive the Duke of Clarence, who would fly his flag in her and participate in the naval war against France. Although *LONDON* joined the Channel Fleet under Lord Howe, Clarence was prevented from returning to sea so Keats had to pay the ship off in March 1794 and, on 24 May that year, was given command of H.M.S. *GALATEA* (36).

Keats spent most of the remainder of the war with Revolutionary France in the Channel and the Bay of Biscay. While Nelson was engaged in the Mediterranean and off Cadiz, Keats was active in the Channel Fleet. Once Lord Howe had won his famous victory over a French fleet on 1 June 1794 the French Atlantic fleet was largely confined to its ports and the role of the British fleet in those sectors was principally one of blockade. If the blockade of Brest and Rochefort was far from glamorous it was a necessary contribution to the naval war with France and Keats's part in it, although it prevented him from serving with Nelson at that time, gained him his share of laurels. As a frigate captain with experience of combined operations and a sure touch for navigation in coastal waters, Keats came into his own with the Channel Fleet. In 1795 he participated in the ill-fated Quiberon expedition, landing and then re-embarking French royalist troops on the west coast of France; en route to Quiberon Keats spotted the French Channel fleet at sea, sent a report of its movements to Lord Bridport and then witnessed it being engaged on 23 June, as a result of which action three French ships-of-the line were captured.

In the summer of 1796, his navigational skills resulted in his ship being able to chase into shoal water and run ashore two French frigates, both of which were destroyed. In 1797, when in harbour in Plymouth, *GALATEA's* ship's company became infected by the mutinies that had spread west from The Nore and Spithead and Keats was forced to quit his ship, losing command of her at the end of May. In June 1797, though, he obtained command of another frigate, H.M.S. *BOADICEA* (38) and returned to the Channel Fleet, quelling a mutiny en route, where he was principally employed in the close blockade of Brest. Here, in 1798, he was successful in capturing prizes through remarkably daring feats of navigation and responsible for spotting an escaping French fleet, transporting troops for an invasion of Ireland, in time for it to be intercepted, brought to battle and deterred from its mission.

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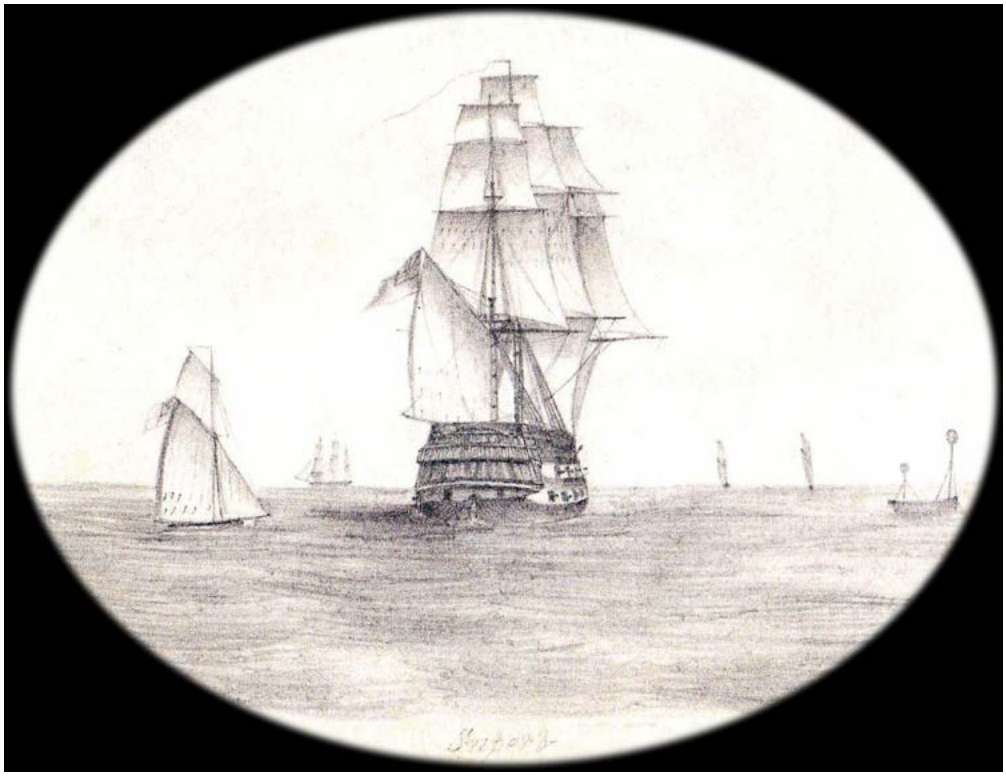
[17] ADM 9/1, f. 46. Most sources copy Ralfe in giving the 'May 1782' as the date when Keats assumed command of *BONETTA* but his record of service gives 1 August 1782.
[18] Knight, pp 564-570.

Keats and *BOADICEA* generally remained close inshore off Brest through 1799 and 1800, occasionally taking prizes and commending themselves to Lord St Vincent, who had taken command of the Channel Fleet in April 1800. Keats's reward for his diligence in blockade, aggression in prize-taking and masterly ship handling came on 17 March 1801, when he was given command of H.M.S. *SUPERB* (74), and moved to a new station, off Cadiz, thus beginning a new chapter in his career.



H.M.S. *SUPERB*
From a contemporary sketch

H.M.S. *SUPERB*, with which Keats's name will always be associated, was ordered with her sister H.M.S. *ACHILLE* on 10 June 1795 and was laid down in Thomas Pitcher's Yard at Northfleet, near Gravesend, in August of the same year. Her lines were copied from those of the French *POMPEE* (taken in 1793) and she was measured at 1,916 tons, having an overall length of 182 feet and a 49 foot beam. Mounting thirty 32 pdrs. on her gundeck and thirty 18 pdrs. on her upper deck, she also carried an assortment of other smaller calibre weapons on her quarterdeck and forecastle. Almost three years on the stocks, she was launched on 19 March 1798 and, after fitting out, was commissioned with a crew of 640 officers, men and boys. Keats was to be her captain for six years and she was then to serve as his flagship for a further two-and-a-half years. In 1801, *SUPERB* was still new and had not been part of the Cadiz blockade for long: her resultant speed, combined with her captain's initiative and aggression, were to bring them both to Lord Nelson's attention before the year was out.

Although Keats had served on line-of-battle ships previously, *SUPERB* – apart from his brief period in H.M.S. *LONDON* in 1793/94 – was his first command of one of these heavy yet versatile workhorses of the Royal Navy and he immediately set to work to train her ship's company in his own ideas of seamanship and gunnery. Through a failure in communication, Keats missed Saumarez's defeat in the Bay of Algeciras on 6 July 1801 and although he was characteristically mortified by this, no blame was attached to him. When combined Spanish and French squadrons sailed south from Algeciras into the Mediterranean, en route to Cadiz, on 12 July 1801, Saumarez's ships gave chase from Gibraltar. Saumarez ordered Keats to forge ahead to try and delay the enemy so that the rest of the squadron could come up and engage them. *SUPERB*, being clean-bottomed and undamaged and with a captain and ship's company eager both to revenge the defeat of a week before and expiate any lingering feelings of guilt at their absence from it, set her fore-sail and top-gallants and rapidly accelerated into the darkening western sky, her speed soon being reckoned at 11½ knots as she was pushed westward by a strengthening easterly gale.[19]

By 11.20pm, *SUPERB* was up with the rear of the enemy fleet and, although apparently sighted by the rearmost ships, not engaged by them. Her lookout's reports to Keats persuaded him that the rearmost ships were Spanish three-deckers and that they were sailing abreast of each other. Remaining un-attacked, Keats reduced sail, brought *SUPERB* up onto the starboard quarter of the *REAL CARLOS* (112) and poured a broadside into her from his port guns; this broadside, says White, killed or wounded all the ship's officers, who were at dinner in her cabin, and so left her without leadership.[20] This broadside was followed by two others in rapid succession before the Spanish ship responded: such was the gunnery training that Keats had introduced to his new ship. After ten minutes' action the *REAL CARLOS* was on fire and out of control; like other ships in the Spanish division of the fleet, she

[19] Ralfe, p 496.
[20] White, 'Keats', p 355.

was also firing wildly in the smoke and darkness, heedless of any particular target and this lack of fire-discipline spread to other Spanish ships, with the result that they began to engage each other. As chaos reigned, Keats set more sail and *SUPERB* surged forward into the darkness in search of other prey. As she did so, the *SAN HERMENEGILDO* (112), which had been firing into the *REAL CARLOS*, collided with her and caught fire, both ships soon blowing up. Leaving this carnage and devastation behind, Keats soon caught up with his next target, the *SAN ANTOINE* (74), which was sailing erratically and which *SUPERB* engaged with her port guns, bringing her to a standstill and causing her to surrender after about thirty minutes of action, at about 12.30 in the early morning of 13 July 1801.

For his services on this occasion, Keats received the thanks of Parliament, while Saumarez joined Lord Nelson in the ranks of Knights Companion of the Order of the Bath. For all the pleasure that Keats must have felt at such public recognition of his action, he would probably have been even more pleased had he known of a letter written by Lord Nelson to the Duke of Clarence on 5 August 1801. Nelson's letter was inspired by the report of the action and Keats's account of *SUPERB*'s part in it published in *The London Gazette*:

> '[H.M.S. *MEDUSA*, off Boulogne; 5th August 1801].
> …Most cordially do I congratulate your Royal Highness on the distinguished merits of Captain Keats, your opinion of him was truly formed…' [21]

This is the first known letter in which Nelson refers to Keats but it is clear that Clarence had sung Keats's praises to Nelson before this date. Thus, when Keats and Nelson finally met, in 1803, Nelson was not only primed by Clarence but also impressed by Keats's actions of July 1801.

The short-lived 'Peace of Amiens' of October 1801-May 1803 provided no respite for Keats and he remained with H.M.S. *SUPERB*, stationed in the Mediterranean. By July 1803, when Nelson came out to take command of the Mediterranean Fleet, Keats was engaged in the blockade of Toulon and Nelson lost no time, either in meeting him or in writing to their mutual friend Clarence, about his impressions:

> 'July 9th 1803.
> I joined the Fleet yesterday, and it was with much sorrow that I saw your Royal Highness's friend, Captain Keats, looking so very ill; but he says he is recovering. I have such a high respect for his character, that I should be happy in doing all in my power to promote it. He is too valuable an officer for the King's service to lose.' [22]

As White says, this letter to Clarence, '…is the first hint of the ill health that was to stalk Keats for the rest of his career and, eventually, brought it to a premature close.' [23] It is also, as was a private letter written two days later to Hugh Elliot (1752-1813), Minister in Naples 1803-06, an indication of Nelson's capacity not only to form instant opinions about people but also, once having formed them, only very rarely to change his mind: he was not to change his mind about Keats. In his private letter to Elliot, having in his official letter of the same date described Keats as, '…one of the very best Officers in his Majesty's Navy', Nelson wrote:

> 'July 11th 1803.
> Give me leave to introduce Captain Keats to your particular notice. His health has not been very good, but I hope that he will soon recover; for his loss would, I assure you, be a serious one to our Navy, and particularly to me; for I esteem his <u>person</u> alone as equal to <u>one</u> French 74, and the Superb and her Captain equal to two 74-gun Ships…'[24]

This was praise indeed and Nelson clearly so enjoyed his earliest assessments of Keats – as 'one of the very best Officers' and the comparison between Keats and a 74 – that, never one to suppress ringing phrases, he used both again in letters to Clarence on 6 September 1803 and 15 August 1804.[25] At first, despite Nelson's approval of Keats, the letters between the two men were formal, as befitted letters between an admiral and a captain under his command and as far as can be assessed from the survival of the printed record. By January 1804, Keats had proved his worth to Nelson through not only reducing his fourteen days' sick leave to nine but also in conducting surveying missions throughout the western Mediterranean and detailed, complicated and patience-testing negotiations with the Dey of Algiers over the expulsion of the British consul and the enslavement of Christian ships' crews: by that time, Nelson was addressing Keats as 'My dear Sir'.[26] Keats was to spend an inordinate amount of time in 1804 and early 1805 representing Nelson in protracted negotiations with the Dey and much of Keats's correspondence with Nelson that survives in the British Library is connected with this. By January 1804, Keats clearly felt sufficiently at ease in his private letters to Nelson to address him as 'my dear Lord' and in a private letter from *SUPERB*, then at anchor in the Bay of Algiers, dated 17 January 1804, Keats wrote:

> 'Your approbation will never cease to afford me comfort and, when successful, happiness...' [27]

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[21] Nicolas, IV, p 441. *The London Gazette extraordinary*, 15392, 3.8.1801, pp 945-946; Keats's letter is on p 946.
[22] Nicolas, V, p 125.
[23] White, 'Keats', p 357.
[24] Nicolas, V, p 130.
[25] Nicolas, V, p 197 & VI, p 156.
[26] Nicolas, V, p 376.
[27] BL Add. Mss. 34922, f.68.

Nelson had written to Clarence in December 1803 bringing the duke up-to-date with his assessment of their mutual friend, as Keats had clearly become by that time:

'Off Toulon, December 7th 1803.

…I hope now to be allowed to call Keats my friend. He is very much recovered, and cheerful; he is a treasure to the Service…' [28]

Nelson repeated the reference to friendship when writing again to Clarence in August 1804, as well as recommending Keats to Clarence as an adviser, should Clarence ever entertain hopes of being appointed to the Admiralty in some capacity:

'15th August 1804.

…Our friend Keats is quite well; in his own person he is equal in my estimation to an additional Seventy-four; his life is a valuable one to the State, and it is impossible that your Royal Highness could ever have a better choice of Sea friend, or Counsellor, if you go to the Admiralty. Keats will never give that counsel which would not be good for the Service.' [29]

The earliest surviving invitation to dine from Nelson to Keats dates from 10 July 1804 and, aside from providing evidence of convivial friendship between the two men by that time, is significant for two other reasons. Firstly it provides evidence that, by that time, Nelson was willing to do Keats a favour – in this case to arrange a passage home for Lieutenant Richard Buck, R.N., who was Keats's nephew. Secondly it demonstrates that the original, together with similar letters of a personal nature from Nelson to Keats (many of which are quoted below), survived into the 1840s in the possession of another nephew, The Rev. Richard Keats B.A., where they were clearly preserved for their importance to the original recipient and his heirs and in due course were available for transcription by Nicolas.[30] When it seemed likely that Nelson's health would necessitate a return to England, late in 1804, it was to Keats and the *SUPERB* that he turned for assistance and transport:

'Victory, December 3rd 1804.

…I may very soon be your troublesome guest; therefore that I may not hurry your Ship too much, I shall, with your leave, send some of my wine to the Superb this morning – fourteen casks, and about eleven or twelve cases; but, my dear Sir, there are so many things that I have to intrude upon your goodness for, that I hardly see how to make you any amends for the trouble I shall give.' [31]

Later that month, as Nelson's chances of being able to return home receded, he wrote again to Keats asking for the return of '…a few cases, which are wanted to keep me from starving…' and saying that he '… should be glad to see you for five minutes on board the Victory.' [32] By January 1805, when H.M.S. *VICTORY* was moored in Agincourt Sound, Corsica, Nelson was addressing Keats, who was on his way back from yet another trip to Algiers as 'My dear Keats', suggesting to him ways in which to avoid being quarantined by the Governor of Corsica, offering him the negotiating skills of The Reverend Alexander Scott, Nelson's confidential secretary (in arguing the case with the Governor for not quarantining *SUPERB)* and offering him dinner, quarantined or not, as soon as possible.[33] It is clear that by this time the relationship between the two men was one of warm, comradely friendship, allowing banter and jocularity. This tenor was maintained for the remainder of Nelson's life, even when – on 30 March 1805 – he had to reprimand Keats for undue sharpness with Rear Admiral George Murray, captain of the fleet, over the matter of the issue of hammocks: the letter was a private one, not an official reprimand, couched in the most diplomatic of terms and written more in sorrow than in anger.[34]

Keats's devotion professionally to the service and personally to Nelson was never in doubt and never so well demonstrated as in 1805 when, despite H.M.S. *SUPERB* being in poor condition and badly in need of docking and repair, he was determined that she should remain with Nelson as he chased the reported movements of the French fleet across the Mediterranean and back and then across the Atlantic to the West Indies and back. It was this latter chase, with *SUPERB* 'old and foul and slow', 'barnacled and green as grass below' with 'nothing save the guns aboard her bright' that was remembered a century later by Sir Henry Newbolt (1862-1938) in 'The Old Superb' and also set to music by Sir Charles Stanford. While Newbolt exaggerated the sorry state of the ship and the morale of the ship's midshipmen, his pen-portrait of Keats would have been one of which Nelson would have approved:

'…Captain Keats he knew the game, and swore to share the sport, for he never yet came in too late to fight…'[35]

Nelson recognised this devotion and told Clarence about it:

'Victory, March 13th 1805.

'…I hope to meet them [the French fleet] soon for which reason I have deferr'd my departure in the Superb and for the same reason Keats wishes to stay, although his ship ought long time since to have been in England.' [36]

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[28] Nicolas, V, p 302.
[29] Nicolas, V, p 156.
[30] Nicolas, VI, p 106. Lieutenant Richard Buck died a post captain in 1830. For The Rev. Richard Keats B.A., see the entry for the Indian Mutiny Medal 1857-58 awarded to his son, Captain W. McG. Keats, in this catalogue.
[31] Nicolas, VI, pp 283-284.
[32] Nicolas, VI, p 306; 29.12.1804.
[33] Nicolas, VI, pp 321-322; 15.1.1805.
[34] Nicolas, VI, pp 386-387.
[35] Newbolt, Sir H., 'The Old Superb' in *The Island Race* (London, 1898).
[36] White, 'New Letters', p 417.

By May Keats had clearly assured Nelson of his determination to remain in the Mediterranean Fleet while there was a chance of an engagement with the French, since Nelson wrote to him early that month as follows:

'Victory, May 8th 1805.

My dear Keats,
I am very much pleased with the cheerfulness with which you are determined to share the fate of the Fleet. Perhaps none of us would wish for exactly a West India trip; but the call of our Country is far superior to any consideration of self. I will take care that Superb shall have neighbour's fare in everything. I wrote to the Admiralty that Superb would be sent home before the hurricane months….' [37]

Anxious to let their Royal mutual friend know of Keats's determination, Nelson wrote to Clarence two days later:

'Victory off Cape St Vincents May 10th 1805.

…Keats has begged that His Superb may share our fate going to the West Indies, his ship is not quite fit for such a long voyage…'[38]

En route to the West Indies, with H.M.S. *SUPERB* clearly finding the journey trying, Nelson wrote one of the most touching letters sent by him to his friend:

'Victory, May 19th 1805.

My dear Keats,
I am fearful that you may think that the Superb does not go fast as I could wish. However that may be, (for if we all went ten knots, I should not think it fast enough,) yet I would have you be assured that I know and feel that the Superb does all which is possible for a Ship to accomplish; and I desire you will not fret upon the occasion. I hope, and indeed feel confident, that very soon you will help me to secure the Majesteux. I think we have been from Cape St Vincent very fortunate, and shall be in the West Indies time enough to secure Jamaica, which I think is their object. Whatever may happen, believe me, my dear Keats, you most obliged and sincere friend …'

As the world knows, Nelson did not catch the French fleet in the Caribbean and so returned to Gibraltar, where the fleet anchored late in July. From *VICTORY*, while at anchor in Rosia Bay, Nelson wrote to Keats:

'Victory, July 21st 1805.

The Superb will be the first Line-of-Battle Ship, which proceeds to England; but that may not take place for one month, and it may take place in a few days…' [40]

H.M.S.s *VICTORY* and *SUPERB* sailed from Gibraltar for England less than a month later and arrived off the Isle of Wight on 17 August; Nelson and Keats dined together that evening and their ships moored at Spithead on 18 August. On arrival, they saluted the C. in C. Portsmouth, Admiral George Montagu, who probably remembered Keats as the protégé of his father and younger brother of thirty years before.[41] While waiting to clear the quarantine restrictions on 18 August, Nelson wrote to Clarence, letting him know that they had arrived, that neither ship had any man sick and that 'Keats is very well...'.[42]

The close friendship between Keats and Nelson, of which Nelson's Bath Star is such impressively tangible evidence, had little more than two months to run by the time their ships moored at Spithead. While both men remained in England, they also remained in touch, although Keats was busy overseeing the refitting of *SUPERB* in Portsmouth Dockyard and Nelson busy between political matters in London and domesticity at Merton. On 22 August 1805, with *SUPERB* still at anchor at Spithead, Keats wrote Nelson a letter that is indicative of the feelings that he – and his ship's company – had for Nelson:

'My dear Lord,
In obedience to your Commands I embrace an early opportunity of Informing your Lordship that the Superb is ordered to dock and refit at Portsmouth. I apprehend the fate of the Ship's Company will be determined by the State in which they find the Ship when taken into Dock. Should it be mine to take her again to Sea, I am sure no circumstance could afford me more pleasure than that of finding myself once more under your Lordship's command.

Permit me to assure you that we all feel much pleasure in finding that all classes write in the sentiments of admiration of your Lordship's judicious and persevering endeavours and that I have the honor to remain.
With great respect and obligation,
your Lordship's faithfull and Obdt. Humble Servt., R.G. Keats.' [43]

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[37] Nicolas, VI, p 429.
[38] White, 'New Letters', p 428.
[39] Nicolas, VI, p 442.
[40] Nicolas, VI, p 482.
[41] Knight, p 496; Nicolas, VII, pp 7-8.
[42] White, 'New Letters', p 438.
[43] BL Add. Mss. 34930, f. 190.

Nelson's reply to this letter is the last known extant letter from him to Keats. In it, Nelson used a phrase which has been used as part of the title of this essay and which neatly sums up Nelson's opinion of Keats; he also said much that reinforces our knowledge of the immense mutual regard and friendship of the two men and the potential influence of Clarence on Keats's career and prospects:

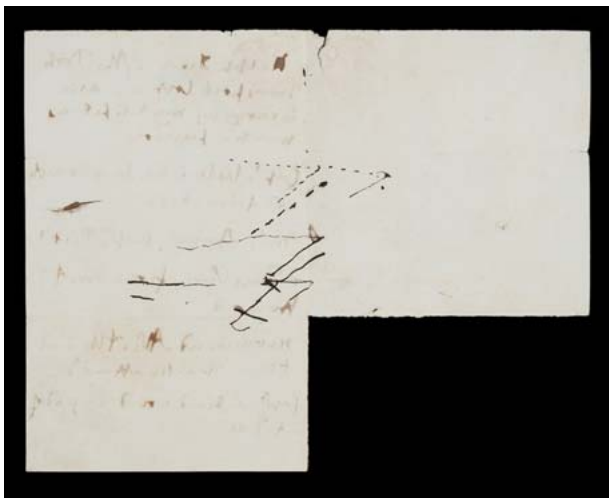
'Merton, August 24th 1805.
My dear Keats,

Many thanks for your kind letter. Nothing, I do assure you, could give me more pleasure than to have you at all times near me, for without compliment, I believe your head is as judicious as your heart is brave, and neither, I believe, can be exceeded...The Royal Duke wrote you from Merton about yourself, I believe, but when I can see Lord Castlereagh I shall know positively what they mean to do; perhaps you may pass by Merton in your way to London; if you come by Epsom it is the nearest road to pass my door. Ever, my dear Keats, your most faithful and obliged friend.

Nelson and Bronte'

We know that Keats did go to Merton, probably early in September 1805 according to White, because of a 'Memorandum of a conversation between Lord Nelson and Admiral Sir Richard Keats, the last time he was in England, before the Battle of Trafalgar.'[44] This memorandum, which Nicolas reproduced in 1846, was copied in 1829 from an account, by Keats, of a conversation that took place between the two men while, '...walking with Lord Nelson in the grounds at Merton, talking on naval matters...'.[45] In the conversation, as recounted by Keats, Nelson outlined what his battle plan would be when, finally, he met the French fleet; having told Keats of his plan, Nelson asked Keats for his opinion and then, while Keats was considering it, told him his:

> ...I'll tell you what I think of it. I think it will surprise and confound the Enemy. They won't know what I am about. It will bring forward a pell-mell Battle, and that is what I want.' [46]



Nelson's rough sketch of his battle plan, as outlined to Keats during their meeting at Merton in 1805.
For a detailed analysis, see White, 2001.

It may be inferred from Keats's account of the conversation that Nelson assumed that H.M.S. *SUPERB* would be with him at this projected 'pell-mell Battle' but it was not to be. H.M.S. *VICTORY* and Nelson left Spithead on 14 September 1805. *SUPERB* was released from the dock in Portsmouth on 25 September and when Keats wrote one of his last letters to Nelson, dated from Portsmouth on 1 October 1805, he had been told that she would remain in the hands of the dockyard until 15 October; thereafter, as Keats wrote:

> '...no time shall be lost on our parts to join your Lordship with all possible expedition. This thrusting her out of Dock before she was ready for our work answers no good purpose to any of us, and an ill one indeed to me as it had bro't me unnecessarily early from my old Father's and thereby abridged one's short comforts, which I shd. not have begrudged if I could have been a day sooner with your Lordship by it.' [47]

SUPERB was selected by the Admiralty to be the flagship of Vice Admiral Sir John Duckworth K.B. (1748-1817), who was to become third-in-command to Nelson but was delayed in Plymouth from sailing. By the time she, Duckworth and Keats reached Cadiz, on 15 November, the Battle of Trafalgar had been fought and Nelson was dead. It would have been small consolation to Keats to receive the news that he had been made a colonel of Royal Marines – a largely honorary post that was accompanied by a useful salary – on 9 November 1805.

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[44] White, 'Keats', p 361.
[45] Nicolas, VII, p 241.
[46] Nicolas, ibid.
[47] BL Add. Mss. 34931, ff. 245-246.

Relations between Keats and Duckworth were barely cordial but the admiral was still flying his flag in *SUPERB* when, on 6 February 1806, Duckworth's squadron fought a short, controlled and decisive action against the French squadron of five ships-of-the-line off St Domingo. Elsewhere in this catalogue is recounted the story of how Keats came to have Nelson's cousin aboard his ship at this time. *SUPERB* led the squadron into action, with a portrait of Nelson hung on the mizzen stay by Keats and with her band playing 'Nelson of the Nile'; by the end of the battle three of the French ships had been taken and the two others destroyed by being run on shore.[48] Duckworth gave full praise to Keats in his Dispatch; Keats was again thanked by Parliament, awarded a Captain's gold medal by the King and also presented with a silver vase of one hundred pounds' value by the Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's.[49]

After St Domingo, Keats and *SUPERB* returned to the Cadiz blockade and then took Duckworth to England, where he hauled down his flag and *SUPERB* was redeployed to the blockade of Brest. Keats was given command of a small flying squadron off Rochefort and in March 1807 the significance of this new command was recognised by Keats being made a commodore. Keeping the French in port remained a priority for the Royal Navy and doing so, close inshore and in bad weather, was not a task easily performed: as Lord St Vincent wrote, 'It is very hazardous and under the orders of almost any other man than Captain Keats who professes so much knowledge of that Sea I should judge it improper to be continued during the winter months.' [50] Fortunately for Keats's health, which was becoming increasingly precarious, he was relieved of that duty in April 1807 and ordered to take his commodore's broad pendant to the Baltic in the fleet being assembled there to restrict the movements of the Danish fleet – Denmark then being sympathetic to Napoleonic France. Keats hoisted his pendant in H.M.S. *GANGES* (74) until *SUPERB* arrived, when he transferred it to her, and commanded his squadron successfully in its mission to cut off Copenhagen from reinforcement by Danish troops during the British siege of the Danish capital. The success of the mission was reflected in Keats's promotion to rear admiral of the blue on 2 October 1807 and he hoisted his flag in *SUPERB* before returning home to take some well-earned leave.

Late in April 1808, Keats was ordered to return to the Baltic as second-in-command to Sir James Saumarez, on whose orders he had forged ahead after the French and Spanish squadrons escaping out of Algeciras on 12 July 1801. H.M.S. *SUPERB* was still in the Baltic and so he sailed to join her on H.M.S. *MARS* (74). As an admiral, he was now ideally suited to begin to dispense some of the patronage from which he had benefited as a young man: one recorded instance of this must serve to indicate how the system worked, albeit at the highest level. Shortly after Keats had been promoted rear admiral, sometime early in November 1807, the Duke of Clarence wrote to him:

> 'I am anxious to send Henry to sea and ultimately he shall go... Both as an Englishman and as a father I am truly anxious to put my second son into the Navy; he will I think turn out all I can wish and particularly if under your kind care and protection...I truly hope you will shortly be employed so as to gain both honours and riches, but not too far off so that Henry may join you in the spring. The boy himself is delighted with the idea and talks of you and the Navy with rapture.' [51]

'Henry' was Henry Fitzclarence, second son of the duke by Mrs Jordan, and – aged eleven and accompanied by his father to see him off – he joined H.M.S. *MARS* in the Downs on 20 April 1808 and was rated 1st Class Volunteer; two months later, by which time Keats had shifted his flag back to H.M.S. *SUPERB* in the Baltic, Clarence wrote to Keats, 'he cannot be in better hands than yours.' [52] Mrs Jordan clearly shared Clarence's opinion of Keats, writing in December 1808 that, '...the attention and kindness of Admiral Keats to all the boys [in the flagship] is more like the affectionate care of a father than a master.' [53]Henry Fitzclarence's naval career did not prosper, probably because he was unable to spend all his formative years under Keats's care, and he was discharged in May 1811, transferring to the Army and joining his brother in his uncle's regiment, 10th Hussars. Recognising that Keats had done all he could for Henry, Clarence wrote to him in September 1811:

> 'I wish Henry had remained with you, but that being now over the less I say on that subject the better. I must however be sincerely interested in your welfare after an uninterrupted friendship has subsisted between us for more than three and thirty years... believe me, Dear Keats, yours most unalterably, William.' [54]

Keats's role in the Baltic in 1808 reflected the rapidly changing balance of power in Europe after 1807, when Napoleon signed an alliance with Russia but – a year later – made the ultimately fatal mistake of alienating Spain by making his brother Joseph that nation's king. On 2 May 1808, Spain rose in revolt against France, after eleven years of alliance, and became an ally of Britain; suddenly, a Spanish army of 12,000 men deployed in Denmark became allies and not enemies and Britain was asked to help return them to Spain so that they could be redeployed against the common enemy. Only the Royal Navy could do this and Keats, with his long experience of embarking and disembarking troops, was the ideal man for the job. On 23 July 1808 Admiralty orders were sent to Keats in the Baltic, where he was commanding the division of Saumarez's fleet stationed in the Great Belt, between the islands of Funen and Zealand, to secure British trade routes from attack. By early August, Keats had been closely involved in intelligence operations aimed at apprising the Spaniards of the position without, at the same time, allowing the French to find out. The Spanish commander, the Marqués de la Romana, captured the port of Nyborg on 9 August, in which were sufficient small craft to allow the troops to be embarked once the Danish defences had been neutralised; Keats shifted his flag to a sloop in order to be able closely to supervise the operation and, in two days, six thousand Spanish soldiers were embarked into the British men-of-war and smaller craft and into the Danish vessels requisitioned in Nyborg. This was all done with a minimum of fuss, extraordinary attention to

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[48] Knight, p 539.
[49] Many sources state that the Patriotic Fund awarded Keats a sword of £100 value but, as with the other captains of ships at St Domingo, the award was of a £100 vase: Southwick, p 44.
[50] White, 'Keats', p 362.
[51] Owen, p 42.
[52] Owen, ibid.
[53] Owen, ibid.
[54] Owen, p 45.

detail and planning by Keats and was almost wholly successful in evacuating the Spanish forces in Denmark: as Davey says, 'this was an exemplary example of seamanship, organizational expertise and diplomacy.' [55] In writing to Keats to congratulate him, Saumarez said:

> 'In the Important service you have rendered to the country in extricating the Spanish Troops from being any longer in the claws of the Enemy I cannot too highly applaud the Skill and judgment you have displayed, and the Perseverance and Zeal of the Captains, Officers and Men under your command.' [56]

In all, sixty ships, of various sizes, took the Spanish soldiers to Gothenburg, where they arrived on 27 August 1808; on 6 September a fleet of transports arrived from Britain, which left Gothenburg for Spain on 9 September and arrived at Santander on 9 October. Romana's soldiers went on to play a significant part in the Peninsular War, which Napoleon famously described as the 'Ulcer' that finally destroyed his ambitions. Predictably, Clarence wrote to Keats to congratulate him on 26 August:

> '...the Spanish spoke in the highest terms of you...Romana's dispatches were full of gratitude towards to you for your conduct to him and his countrymen in public and in the manner they are treated by you; indeed they drank your health...I was immediately informed of the success of your well planned expedition in favour of the gallant Spaniards... and believe me the most important service yet performed in any war is the exploit since executed by you: the advantages are incalculable and I rejoice most sincerely that it has fallen to my friend's lot to achieve this important and glorious event...exclusive of the advantage to the country... I have also seen the King, and the Queen has assured me he thinks as highly of the event as I do.' [57]

Tangible evidence of the King's approval came in October, when *The London Gazette* announced that Keats was to be created a Knight Companion of the Order of the Bath.[58] The insignia were delivered to Keats's colleague, Rear Admiral Thomas Bertie, who knighted Keats on the King's behalf in the great cabin of H.M.S. *SUPERB.* [59] As a result of his knighthood, Keats was approached by George Nayler, genealogist of the Order of the Bath, asked about his family's arms and asked what supporters and motto he would like to be granted (see lot 2). Initially selecting 'Restituit' ('Restored') as a motto – of which his father approved, perhaps feeling that his son had restored the family's fortunes and status – Keats subsequently changed it to 'Mi Patria Es Mi Norte' ('My Country Is My North' – using 'North' in the sense of the compass point). The legend was included on a Spanish medal struck to commemorate the successful repatriation of their soldiers. [60] As well as a knighthood from his King, Keats was given a cased pair of silver-mounted French pistols, from the Versailles *manufacture* of Nicolas-Nöel Boutet, by the Marqués de la Romana. [61]

Frozen into the Baltic during the winter of 1808-09, Keats came home in H.M.S. *SUPERB* in July 1809, escorting a convoy of 400 ships, and was almost immediately ordered to the Scheldt as second-in-command to Rear Admiral Sir Richard Strachan, Bart., K.B. (1760-1828) as the naval part of an expedition against the Dutch coast. The expedition proving largely abortive, Keats came home in September 1809 and paid off *SUPERB* on 5th November, leaving a ship that had been home to him, and participated in three of the great events of his career, after more than eight-and-a-half years of almost uninterrupted association. On 25 October 1809, during an extended period of sick leave, he was advanced to rear admiral of the white, but his ill health forced him to decline the offer of the governorship of Malta. On 11 July 1810 he returned from sick leave to hoist his flag in H.M.S. *IMPLACABLE* (74) and on 31st July was advanced to rear admiral of the red. In *IMPLACABLE* he commanded a fleet based off Cadiz and worked closely with the Army in hit-and-run attacks on those parts of the Spanish coast held by the French; as a naval commander who knew his business, was a master of detail and was anxious to co-operate for the common good, Keats soon established a good working relationship with the Army's battlefield commanders. During his time off Cadiz, he had shifted his flag from *IMPLACABLE* to H.M.S. *MILFORD* (78) and then to H.M.S. *HIBERNIA* (110). On 1 August 1811, he was promoted to vice admiral of the blue and given the choice of remaining off Cadiz or becoming second-in-command in the Mediterranean: he chose the latter option, remaining initially in *HIBERNIA* but subsequently shifting his flag to H.M.S. *CENTAUR* (74) until his health broke down again and he was forced to return home in September 1812.

In February 1813 he was offered and accepted the post of governor of Newfoundland and commander-in-chief of that station. Hoisting his flag in H.M.S. *BELLEROPHON* (74), a ship that later gained fame by conveying the defeated Napoleon to Plymouth after the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815, he remained in Newfoundland, shifting his flag to the new H.M.S. *SALISBURY* (58) in 1814, until returning home in April 1816. While in Newfoundland, he was advanced to vice admiral of the white on 4 June 1814 and occasionally came home to consult with the admiralty. On one of these visits home, in March 1814, he met Earl Nelson and was presented with the magnificent Star of the Order of the Bath that had belonged to his late friend, Vice Admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson: he may even have chosen to wear the Star on occasion between March 1814 and January 1815. In January 1815, the Order of the Bath was substantially modified, changing from a single-class order to one with three classes and two divisions: Keats's status thus changed from that of a Knight Companion of the Order of the Bath (K.B.) to a Knight Grand Cross of the Military Division of the Order of the Bath (G.C.B.), and it would have been shortly after January 1815 that he obtained from the Royal jewellers the G.C.B. Star, offered in this catalogue together with Keats's K.B. Grant of Arms (see lot 2).

On his return to England in April 1816, Keats retired to Devon but he was neither to be forgotten nor unrewarded. He was appointed a major general of Royal Marines on 7 May 1818 and advanced to vice admiral of the red on 12 August 1819. A bachelor all his life, married to the Service and the sea, he altered this state on 27 June 1820 when he married Miss Mary Hurt.

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[55] Davey, p 702.
[56] Davey, ibid.
[57] Davey, p 705.
[58] *The London Gazette*, 16191, 11.10.1808, p 1401; the date of the announcement was 15 October 1808.
[59] White, 'Keats', p 364.
[60] Keats family papers; Ralfe, p 508.
[61] Sold Sotheby's Olympia, 26.6.2003; lot 289.

The following year, he was appointed Governor of Greenwich Hospital, the retirement home for naval pensioners, and at once set to work to institute long overdue changes in the welfare of the pensioners and administration of the hospital. Promoted admiral of the blue on 27 May 1825, he was advanced to admiral of the white on 22 July 1830 and died at Greenwich on 5 April 1834.

By the time of Keats's death, his Royal friend and patron had become King William IV and the King ensured that Keats's funeral and memorials were as reflective of their long friendship and of his estimation of Keats's qualities as possible. As *The Times* reported:

> 'His Majesty, who was an old shipmate of Sir Richard's, and who had a warm regard for him, gave orders to have his funeral conducted with all the honours due to his high station in the British service. Orders were, in consequence, issued to the naval officers of His Majesty's household to attend the funeral in full uniform. The Lords of the Admiralty, including the First Lord (Sir James Graham), were also in attendance.' [62]

Keats's coffin was borne by pensioners who had served with him in H.M.S. *SUPERB* and the pall was carried by six admirals. He was buried in a mausoleum in the grounds of the hospital and King William commissioned a memorial to him in the hospital's chapel that recorded the King's 'esteem for the exemplary character of a friend, and his grateful sense of the valuable services rendered to his country by a highly distinguished and gallant officer.' [63]

Since his death there have been many assessments of the achievements and qualities of Admiral Sir Richard Keats G.C.B.. Few have apportioned to Keats the level of praise given to him and about him by Lord Nelson, his superior officer and then his friend for two years and two months, but, perhaps, none knew his strengths and weaknesses as intimately as did Nelson. The most modern, accurate and succinct assessment is probably that of Professor Roger Knight, in his 2005 biography of Nelson:

'Keats was one of the most talented sea officers of his generation.' [64]

Stephen Wood MA FSA
With thanks to Professor Roger Knight

The revised Keats Arms, as prepared for Admiral William Keats (see lot 3) in 1838, including the motto adopted by his uncle after 1808 (Keats family papers).

For Sir Richard's Grant of Arms with Bath and supporters, see lot 2.

[62] *The Times,* 14 April 1834.
[63] Sainsbury.
[64] Knight, p 648.

‡1

The Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Knight Companion's Breast Star, *circa* 1797, awarded to Vice-Admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson following the Battle of Cape St Vincent, 14 February 1797; the eight-pointed silver star with machine-cut sprung rays, the tips fitted with gold loops for thread suspension; the centre in gold, silver and enamels, with motto of the Order TRIA JUNCTA IN UNO, reverse fitted with two gold catch-pins and a concave gold backplate engraved over thirteen lines:

The Star of VICE ADMIRAL *Lord Viscount Nelson Duke of Bronté KB &c &c.*
Who fell in his last GLORIOUS VICTORY *off Cape Trafalgar the - 21 October 1805. -*
Presented to Vice Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats by EARL NELSON *24th March* - 1814. -

height 96.8mm, width 95.8mm, diameter of backplate 36.8mm, *in extremely fine lightly-worn condition overall, reverse of lower ray with trace of removal of a further pin or fitment, rim of backplate with faint engraver's scratch marks;* housed in a red morocco fitted case of the type used by Rundell and Bridge and their successors and offered with **a manuscript letter, in original cover with seal, recording the gift of the Star to Vice Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats, K.B.** (lot) £300,000-500,000

The letter reads as follows:

Portman Square
March 24th 1814

My Dear Sir
I hope you will do me the favour to accept the Star herewith sent, in testimony of your esteem for, & the mutual friendship which subsisted between yourself & my lamented & beloved Brother.

I am, with great regard,
your faithful & obliged
humble Servant
Nelson & Bronte.

The official announcement of Nelson's award appeared in the *London Gazette:* 27 May 1797:

'The King has alſo been pleaſed to nominate and appoint Horatio Nelſon, Eſq; Rear-Admiral of the Blue, to be One of the Knights Companions of the moſt Honourable Order of the Bath.'

Provenance:
Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, 1st Viscount Nelson of the Nile and Burnham Thorpe and 1st Duke of Bronte (1758-1805);
William Nelson, 1st Earl Nelson and 2nd Duke of Bronte (1757-1835), inherited under the terms of his late brother's will;
Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats, G.C.B. (1756-1834), to whom it was given by William Nelson on 24 March 1814;
Admiral William Keats (circa 1795-1874), nephew of the above;
Thence by direct family descent.

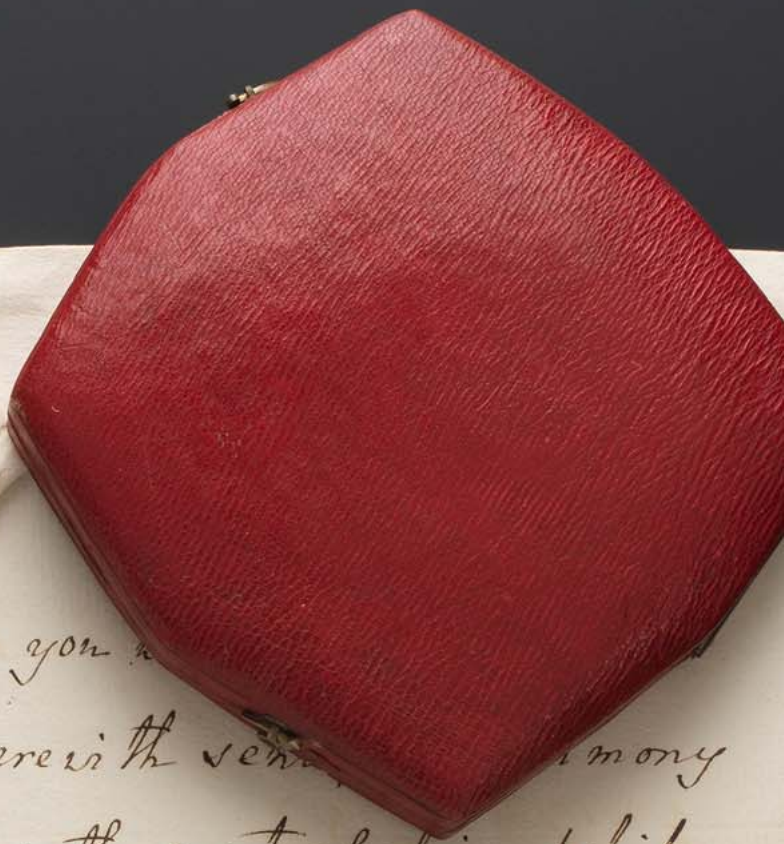
Admiral
G: Keats,
Duke Street
St James's.

Nelson

I hope you
accept the Star herewith sent
of your esteem for, & the mutual friendship
subsisted between yourself & my
& beloved Brother.

I am, with great regard,
your faithful & obliged
humble Servant
Nelson & Bronte

Vice Admiral
Sir R: G: Keats, K: B:
&c, &c, &c;



The discovery - or more correctly the re-discovery - of Nelson's Bath Star, together with the associated letter with which it is offered, inevitably provokes the question: why was it given to Keats?

As has been demonstrated, Nelson and Keats were good friends and colleagues in a professional relationship in which mutual respect was not only paramount but also regularly proclaimed. That said, Keats was not a central figure amongst the 'Band of Brothers' and neither was he at Trafalgar; in fact, Keats and Nelson served together for only a short time and they never shared a fleet action. So why did William Nelson, 1st Earl Nelson - not a man remembered by history for manifestations of open-handed generosity – decide in 1814 to present Admiral Sir Richard Keats with the Star of a Knight Companion of the Order of the Bath that his brother had proudly worn since 1797?

Without a letter from either man exactly explaining the circumstances surrounding the gift, it is impossible to answer that question conclusively. We know that Keats made sure to destroy certain, probably potentially embarrassing, letters to him from H.R.H. The Prince William, Duke of Clarence (later King William IV), with whom Keats corresponded from the 1780s until the end of his life (White, p 351 and n. 16). Only one piece of correspondence between Keats and William Nelson has survived in the public domain, written some eight years before the presentation of this magnificent Star. It may hold the clue to the gift and, in so doing, may provide an insight into one of the practices of the age upon which so many individual careers depended – in a word, patronage.

Notions of patronage permeated Society in Keats's time. He had himself benefited from it in his early years in the Royal Navy and his career was probably affected advantageously to some degree by his closeness to H.R.H. The Prince William, Duke of Clarence, one of whose illegitimate sons he was able to assist with the beginnings of a naval career. Nelson also benefited from patronage during his career and exercised it himself to promote the interests of those whom he considered worthy, or to whom he was obliged through kinship. It is clear that Keats felt and exercised a considerable responsibility for Charles Nelson, a young man whose father had died when he was only four years old and whose cousin and potential patron, the Hero, had been killed less than a month after he had joined the Navy. It is likely that William Nelson was only too happy for Keats to assume this responsibility after Horatio's death, and was grateful to him for doing so.

The following letter from Keats to William Nelson is preserved in the British Library, among the Nelson papers (Add. Mss. 34992, ff. 84-85). Written from 'Superb at Sea' – in fact, off Barbados in the West Indies – and dated 11 January 1806, it reads:

> 'My dear Lord,
>
> Tho' I owe you every manner of good will and wish you every possible success, I cannot for my life congratulate you on your accession to honors which has cost our Country and many of us so dearly, but I sincerely hope every distinction and liberality which a grateful nation can confer will be bestowed on the heirs and successors of the departed Hero.
>
> One of those circumstances to which in the Navy we are peculiarly subject has taken the Superb from the Mediterranean to the West Indies, and I hope will soon carry her back again; before we left the Eastern Shore of the Atlantic I sent by the particular recommendation of Sir John Duckworth whose Flag is still in the Superb all the remaining things I bro't from England for the late Lord Nelson to his successor in the command of the Mediterranean Lord Collingwood, who will I am sure take care to have them scrupulously accounted for to the Executors of Lord Nelson. The small paper parcel which I received from you together with another and a few private letters I sent by Capt. Capel of the Phoebe, who I daresay has taken great care to have them conveyed to you or Lord Nelson's Executors. I enclose a List of the articles sent to Lord Collingwood – a copy of which I pray you to give his Lordship's Executors.
>
> Your Nephew Charles who (as I had no opportunity of meeting Lord Collingwood and the Victory having left station before the Superb arrived on it) is still with me – is in good health and spirits and a very good boy – and if contrary to my expectations the Superb should be detained in the West Indies 'till the Sickly Season which be [illegible] in about July I have thoughts of sending him to England. I have hinted as much to his Mother to whom I write by this Packet, and I shall be glad to receive your wishes and commands respecting him. For it would grieve me exceedingly shd. any accident befall him whilst under my care. I keep him rated Mid. and you may be assured he shall be supplied with every thing necessary. On Xmas day we had a sight of an enemy Squadron just our Numbers, but they were unusually favour'd by the winds – and as no Action could have taken place but on very unequal terms (our Squadron being much separated in the chace) none did. This has bro't us where we are near Barbados, from whence I send this –
>
> I beg my best compts. to Lady Nelson and your family and have the honour to remain Your Lordships very Humble Servant, R.G. Keats.'

Charles Nelson was not William Nelson's nephew, although he was of a sufficiently younger generation that Keats could be forgiven for making such an error. He was in fact a distant cousin of William and Horatio Nelson: their grandfathers had been brothers, being two of the three sons of William Nelson (c.1654-1713) of Scarning and Dunham Parva in Norfolk. Whereas William, Horatio and their siblings descended from the youngest brother, The Rev. Edmund Nelson M.A. (1696-1747), vicar of Sporle and rector of Hilborough, Norfolk, Charles and his siblings descended from the eldest brother, Thomas Nelson (1683-1762) of Sporle (Burke, p 1119 & Nelson, *passim*).

Vice Admiral
Sir R: G: Keats, K: B:
32- Duke Street
St James's.

Nelson

Portman Square
March 24th: 1814.

My Dear Sir

I hope you will do me the favour to accept the Star herewith sent, in testimony of your esteem for, & the mutual friendship which subsisted between yourself & my lamented & beloved Brother.

I am, with great regard,
your faithful & obliged
humble Servant
Nelson & Bronte

Vice Admiral
Sir R: G: Keats, K: B:
&c, &c, &c;

The youngest of three children of The Rev. Edmund Nelson M.A. (1725-95), rector of Congham, Norfolk, Charles was born in 1791 (Norfolk Registers). As O'Byrne records, he entered the Royal Navy on 30 September 1805 as a midshipman on H.M.S. *SUPERB* (74), Captain R.G. Keats. A letter from Keats to Horatio Nelson, written from Portsmouth on 1 October 1805 is preserved in the British Library (Add. Mss. 34931, f. 246). Probably the last letter that Keats ever wrote to the Admiral, it goes some way to explaining just how Charles Nelson first came to be aboard H.M.S. *SUPERB*. After some paragraphs regarding the state of the ship after her dockyard refit, and some naval gossip, Keats wrote:

> 'This morning Mr Nicholson bro't me the Youngster of your Lordship's name, a fine smart looking Boy. I rather recommended to him to allow me to send him by Sir Edward Berry as he sails in the morning but he thinks his mother would prefer his going in the Superb so I purpose putting him with two Youngsters of his own age in the house of an acquaintance at Gosport who will have an attentive eye to them and give them the benefit of an Accademy of some reputation till the Ship goes out of the Harbor.'

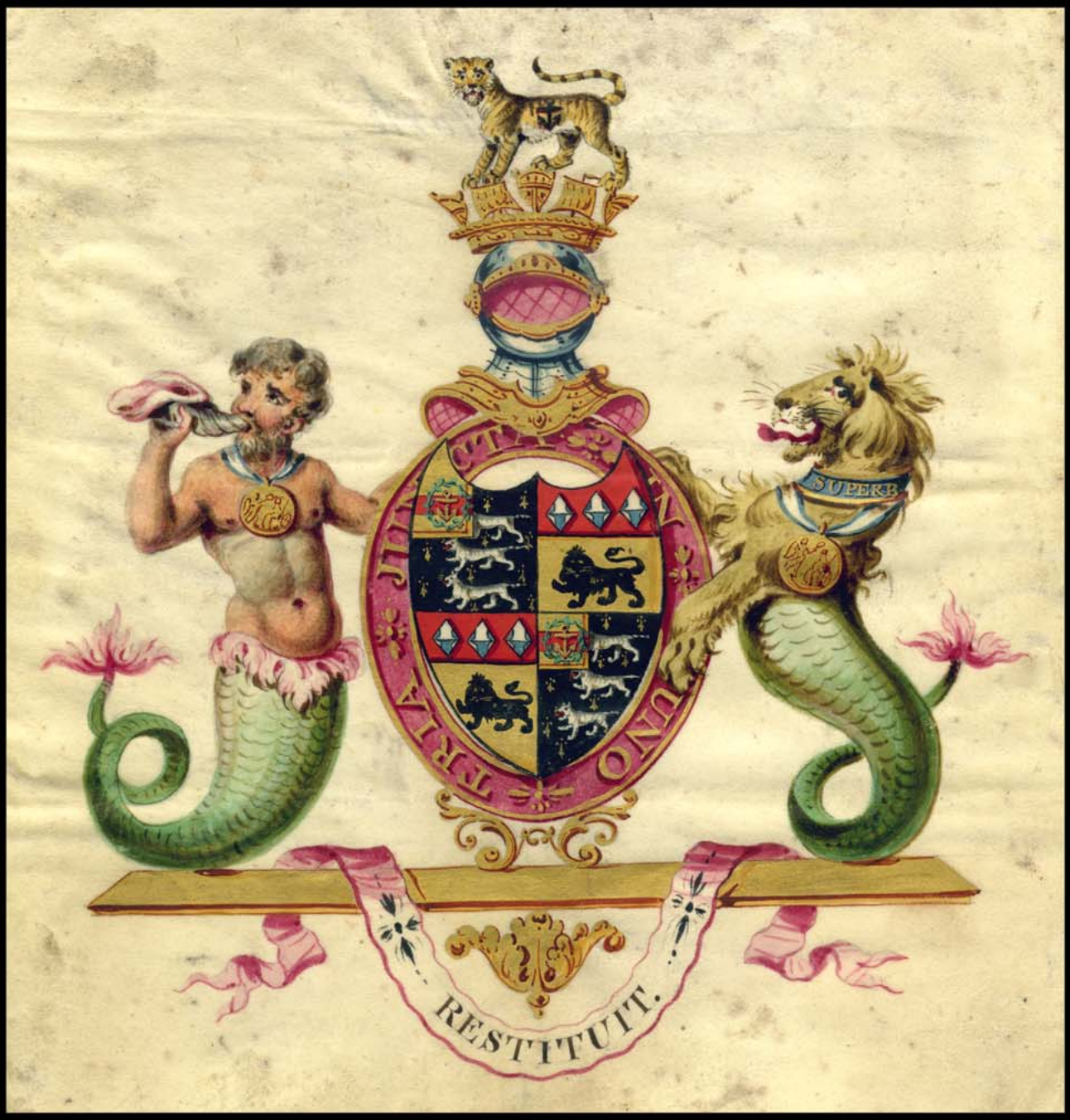
This implies that Keats's intentions, perhaps following informal instructions from Nelson, were to take the young Charles out to his cousin's fleet where he would join H.M.S. *VICTORY*. As is related elsewhere in this catalogue, however, H.M.S. *SUPERB's* delay in sailing prevented this and so Midshipman Nelson remained with Keats aboard his ship. Had he in fact sailed with Sir Edward Berry on H.M.S. *AGAMEMNON*, Charles would indeed have joined the fleet, but in the event he remained with *SUPERB* – and thus generally under Keats's eye, either as captain or, after October 1807, as rear admiral – until July 1809. He served at St Domingo and in the Baltic and, like Keats's own nephew William Keats (see lot 3), he was later to receive the Naval General Service Medal 1793-1840 with clasp for St Domingo. In 1811 Charles Nelson served briefly under Sir Richard once more, whilst passing his lieutenant's examinations.

In March 1814, when William Nelson sent the K.B. Star to Keats, Keats was briefly in London, on leave and on business from the governorship of Newfoundland. He had been appointed to this post on 10 February 1813 and was to occupy it until 16 April 1816. Returning to England on 21 December 1813, Keats was in London on Admiralty business until 4 January 1814 and then on leave until 17 March; he was in London once more on 18 March 1814, just six days before receiving the gift of Nelson's K.B. Star from William Nelson, and left for Newfoundland again on 26 April 1814 (ADM 50/76).

No mention of any meeting with William Nelson is recorded in his official journal, so whatever happened between the two men during this period must have been entirely private and personal.

The gift of Nelson's Star may have marked an act, or many acts, of kindness or discretion on the part of Keats. Like many of Nelson's contemporaries, Keats was fully aware of Nelson's relationship with Emma Hamilton but contrived to remain on good terms with all parties concerned. Keats may also have exercised his patronage in other ways less visible than that clearly extended to Charles Nelson but no less beneficial to William Nelson, whose reputation for actively seeking favours from the great was notorious in his own lifetime and remains well-known today. It is unlikely that the reason for the gift will ever be known for certain but, in that it ensured the survival of a hitherto unknown, highly important and exquisite relic of Horatio, Lord Nelson, all those who hold such things dear must remain grateful to William, 1st Earl Nelson, for making it.

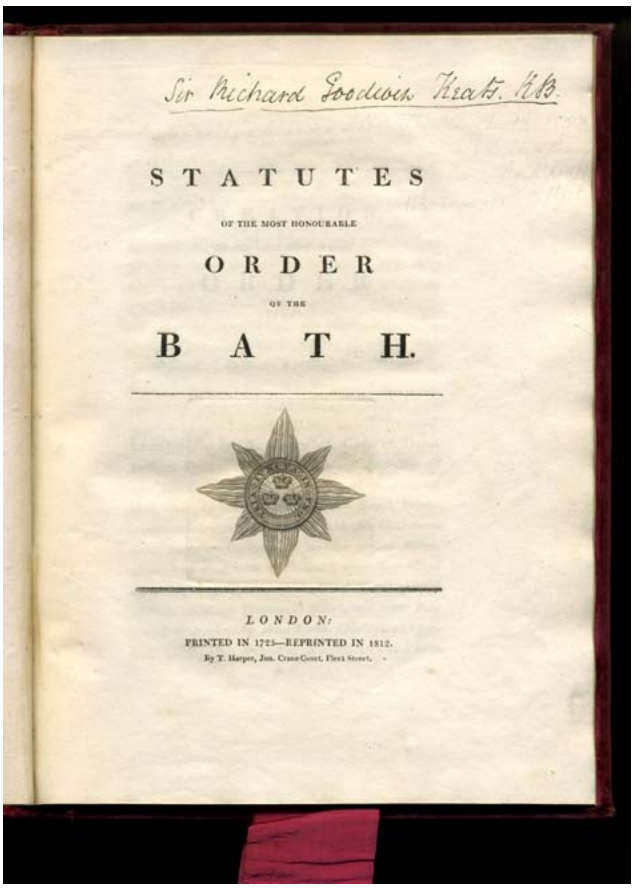
Stephen Wood MA FSA



Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats's Grant of Arms
(included in lot 2)

‡2

The Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Military Division, Grand Cross Breast Star, as awarded to **Vice Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats, G.C.B.;** in silver, gold and enamels, of conventional form as revised in 1815, with hinged gold brooch-pin for suspension, the backplate engraved RUNDELL BRIDGE & RUNDELL *JEWELLERS* TO THEIR MAJESTIES, *His Royal Highneſs the* PRINCE REGENT, *AND THE ROYAL FAMILY,* height 91.7mm, width 85.7mm, *each of the two Ts in motto lacking a serif, extremely fine, in original red morocco fitted case;* together with K.B. Grant of Arms and Statutes (see below) (lot) £3,000-5,000


Sir Richard Goodwin Keats. K.B.

STATUTES

OF THE MOST HONOURABLE

ORDER

OF THE

BATH.

LONDON:

PRINTED IN 1725—REPRINTED IN 1812.

K.B.: *London Gazette: 15 October 1808:*
'The King has been pleaſed to nominate Rear-Admiral Richard Goodwin Keats to be one of the Knights Companions of the Moſt Honourable Order of the Bath.'

G.C.B.: *London Gazette: 4 January 1815.*

Offered with the lot are:

(i) **Sir Richard Keats's Grant of Arms,** *circa* 1809, 188 x 178mm, painted and gilt on vellum *(see illustration on opposite page);* the reverse with indistinct pencil annotations and sketch, and also an ink manuscript note of Keats's revised motto: *Mi Patria Es Mi Norte*

(ii) **Keats's personal copy of the Statutes of the Order of the Bath,** London, 1812, 4to, viii+77pp, in red velvet binding, inscribed on title page and flyleaf, also with paper seal, ribbon and signature of *Fraˢ Townſend (Windſor Herald)*

See also lot 5 for Sir Richard Keats's watch, given to him by H.R.H. The Prince Edward in 1790.

ADMIRAL SIR RICHARD KEATS also received a Captain's Naval Gold Medal and a £100 Patriotic Fund Vase for the significant part he played at the Battle of St Domingo in February, 1806. A detailed study of Keats's career and his relationship with Horatio Nelson will be found elsewhere in this catalogue, and the circumstances under which he came to own Nelson's K.B. star are examined in the footnote to the preceding lot.

‡3

Naval General Service Medal 1793-1840, one clasp, St Domingo, WILLIAM KEATS, VOL^{r} 1ST CLASS., *good extremely fine and deeply toned;* offered with copies of Certificates of Service and other documents taken from originals in the Keats family papers

£2,500-3,500

WILLIAM ABRAHAM KEATS was probably born early in 1795 since he was said to have been eight years old when he arrived at Blundell's School, Tiverton, on 15 August 1803 (Fisher, p 58, no. 875, where his father's first name is wrongly recorded). His father was William Keats, the younger brother of Richard Goodwin Keats. William Keats (the elder) was born on 3 August 1759, commissioned 2nd lieutenant of Marines on 29 October 1780, promoted 1st lieutenant on 18 April 1793 but had died – as, it is said, a captain of Marines – by the time his son entered Blundell's (Pitman, p 45).

William Abraham Keats remained at Blundell's until the autumn of 1805, when his uncle took him aboard H.M.S. *SUPERB* as a 1st Class volunteer. The date of his entry into the service of the Royal Navy is variously recorded as both 27 and 30 September 1805; his lieutenant's passing certificate (Keats family papers) gives the former date but the Memorandum of his services and O'Byrne give the latter (ADM 9/5/1617; O'Byrne p 599). By the end of 1805 Captain Richard Goodwin Keats was to have not one but two protégés on board *SUPERB* – his own nephew William, and Midshipman Charles Nelson, the distant cousin of Lord Nelson (see footnote to lot 1).

William Keats remained aboard H.M.S. *SUPERB* for nearly four years, progressing through various rates – volunteer 1st class, boy 2nd class, volunteer 1st class again, midshipman, ordinary seaman and midshipman again – until leaving the ship in either June or November 1809; as before, the records disagree. Throughout this period he was, of course, under the care and ultimate supervision of his uncle, either as captain or as rear admiral, seeing action at St Domingo on 6 February 1806 and in the subsequent operations in the Baltic.

Discharged in 1809 into H.M.S. *PUISSANT* (74) at Spithead, Keats served in her as a supernumerary until June 1810 before becoming midshipman in H.M.S. *MENELAUS* (38), which had recently been involved in the suppression of a mutiny in Plymouth by the ship's company of H.M.S. *AFRICAINE*. In July 1810 he rejoined his uncle in the Mediterranean and followed him, generally in the rate of midshipman, as Admiral Keats moved his flag from H.M.S. *IMPLACABLE* (74) to H.M.S. *MILFORD* (74) and then to H.M.S. *HIBERNIA* (110) until September 1812, when William Keats transferred as a midshipman to the flagship of Admiral Sir Edward Pellew, H.M.S. *CALEDONIA* (120).

Passing his examination for lieutenant in August 1813, Keats was commissioned in the sloop H.M.S. *PARTRIDGE* (18) in the Mediterranean and served aboard her until October 1814 and the conclusion of the war with France. Once more the records disagree about the date of the commencement of his next commission, as flag lieutenant to his uncle aboard H.M.S. *SALISBURY* (50) on the Newfoundland station, but it was either in March or in May 1815; the commission ceased on 9 December 1815 (ADM 9/5/1617; O'Byrne, p 599). Keats's next commission was aboard H.M.S. *ALBION* (74), the flagship at Sheerness, from 10 December 1815 until 16 April 1816. He was promoted commander on 17 April 1816 and was then unemployed for six-and-a-half years before being given command of the brig-sloop H.M.S. *CHEROKEE* (10), whose station varied between Leith and Cork, on 7 October 1822. Promoted post captain on 27 March 1826, he was not afterwards employed at sea, although he is thought to have held a coastguard appointment at Babbacombe, Devon, in 1833.

Keats married twice. His first wife, Catherine Jane Pitman, died only two months after they were married when she was drowned in a sailing accident off Babbacombe on 8 June 1833. He married his second wife Augusta Maria Lyford on 6 July 1835; their son Rochfort Keats predeceased his father, dying in 1872 aged 35 (Pitman, pp 41-42 & 45). William Abraham Keats lived until the age of 79 and, through his longevity, was promoted on seniority to rear admiral, 1854, vice admiral, 1860, and admiral, 1864. He died on 2 May 1874 at home at Porthill House, Bideford, Devon.

‡4
Indian Mutiny Medal 1857-58, two clasps, Defence of Lucknow, Lucknow, impressed CAP$^{T.}$ W. M^{C}G. KEATS, 84TH REG$^{T.}$, *good extremely fine and toned, in an old fitted case* £2,000-3,000

The lot is offered with copies of letters written by Captain Keats from India (taken from originals in the Keats family papers).

WILLIAM MCGEACHY KEATS was born in Wiveliscombe, Somerset, on 19 October 1824, the youngest son of the Rev. Richard Keats BA (1791-1858), vicar of Wiveliscombe. He was a great-nephew of Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats G.C.B. (Pitman, p 45, and Raikes), and a nephew of Admiral William Abraham Keats (see preceding lot). Following in the family educational tradition, William attended Blundell's School in Tiverton, Devon from October 1833 until December 1836 when he went to Winchester College.

On 9 January 1834 his father was presented with the living of Northfleet, Gravesend, Kent, by King William IV (Fisher, p 132 No. 2155 and Holgate, p 9). Northfleet would have held a particular resonance for the family when the Rev. Richard Keats was translated to the parish, since it was from Thomas Pitcher's Northfleet yard that H.M.S. *SUPERB* had been commissioned in 1795 and launched in March 1798. In 1834 Admiral Sir Richard Keats G.C.B., Governor of Greenwich Hospital and a lifelong friend of the King, was approaching the end his life; it is conceivable that the relocation of the Rev. Richard Keats was influenced by these factors as well as by the convenient proximity of Greenwich and Northfleet (London Gazette, 19118, 10.1.1834, p 56).

Shortly before his eighteenth birthday, William McGeachy Keats was purchased an ensign's commission in the 75th Regiment of Foot, then stationed at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa; his commission was dated 14 October 1842 (London Gazette, 20150, 14.10.1842, p 2792). In the spring of 1843, the regiment sailed for England, being stationed in Plymouth, South Wales and Bristol until September 1845. It was subsequently posted to Ireland, being stationed by detachments in Waterford, Birr, Athlone and Dublin (Gardyne, *passim*). Whilst in Ireland Keats was promoted lieutenant, without purchase, on 21 April 1846 but he then exchanged, eighteen months' later, with a lieutenant in the 84th (York & Lancaster) Regiment of Foot. The exchange took effect from 26th November 1847 (London Gazettes, 20596, 21.4.1846, p 1439, & 20799, 26.11.1847, p 4339), entailing Keats leaving his regiment in Dublin and sailing halfway across the world to Secunderabad in the Indian Presidency of Madras, where the 84th had been stationed since February 1847.

Keats arrived in India on 23 June 1848 and joined his new regiment in Secunderabad, where it remained before being posted to Trichinopoly in January 1850. In January 1854, the 84th was posted to Rangoon, in Burma, and while there Keats married Harriet O'Brien, the sister of a fellow officer, Lieutenant David O'Brien, on 22 October 1855 *(Bombay Times …).* Early in 1857, the first intimations of mutiny in some regiments of the Bengal Army began to be received and the government in Calcutta ordered the 84th to deploy to Bengal with all possible haste. The regiment arrived at Chinsura on 20 March 1857, immediately marching to Barrackpore to oversee the disarming of 19th and 34th Bengal Native Infantry on 31 March before being swept up as part of larger British formations that were hurriedly created to suppress the rebellion in Bengal and parts of northern India conventionally known until recent years as the 'Indian Mutiny' (Wylly, *passim*).

Keats served in one of the two companies of the 84th that were incorporated into the force formed under the command of Brigadier Henry Havelock and tasked, initially, to relieve the besieged garrison at Cawnpore and then to march on Lucknow, which was also under siege. This operation involved Keats seeing service at the battles of Unao, 29 July 1857, Bushiratganj, 5 August 1857, Burbeaki Chowki, 12 August 1857, Mangalwar, 21 September 1857 and Alambagh, 23 September, 1857, as Havelock's force fought its way – at the hottest time of the year, through torrential rains and with an increasing casualty list

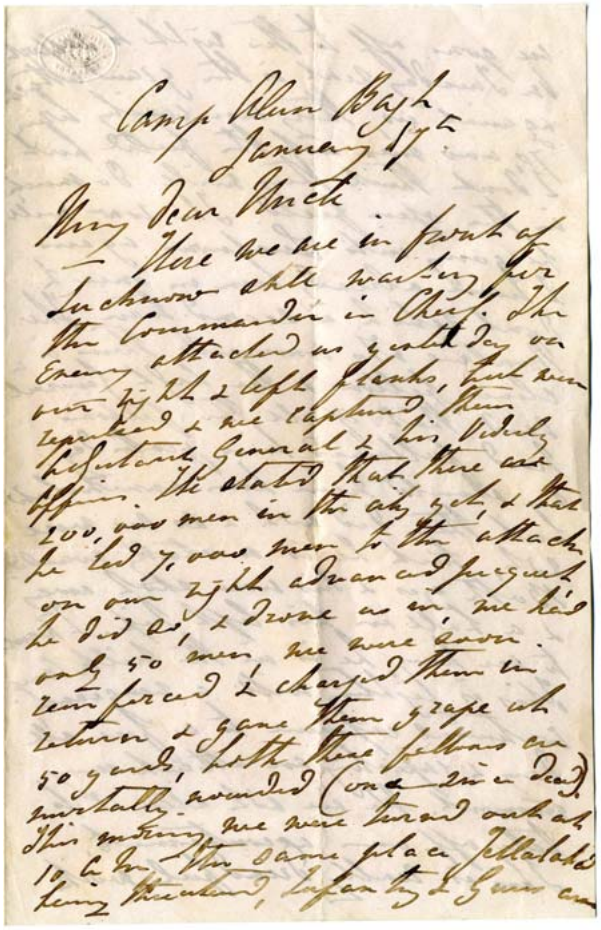
through disease and wounds in action – towards Cawnpore and then on to Lucknow. From September 1857 to March 1858, Keats was involved in the relief, capture and then defence of Lucknow until its second relief; he then served, from March to December 1858, in a field force under command of Brigadier Sir Edward Lugard at the relief of Azamgarh, in pursuit of the rebel commander Kuer Singh and in a variety of other minor actions during the closing months of the rebellion (Raikes). For his campaign service, Keats received the Indian Mutiny Medal with the two clasps 'Defence of Lucknow' and 'Lucknow', an award to which he made reference in a letter to an uncle written on 28 May 1858:

> 'I believe I get a <u>medal</u> & <u>two</u> clasps & I hear my share of prize money will be nearly £2,000. The latter part I don't believe & yet the Commander in Chief is to get £200,000...'(Keats family papers)

During the rebellion, Keats was promoted to captain. His first captaincy was gazetted to 7th Regiment of Foot (or Royal Fusiliers) on 6 November 1857 but this was cancelled when a captaincy became available in the 84th, in which regiment he was gazetted captain on 11 December 1857, with seniority backdated to 27 November 1857 (London Gazettes 22059, 6.11.1857, p 3706, 22071, 11.12.1857, pp 4366-7 and 22077, 29.12.1857, p 4596).

The 84th returned to England in the spring of 1859, disembarking at Gravesend (where Keats's father, the incumbent of Northfleet, had died in the previous year), and marching to Sheffield, where it was quartered until June 1860 (Wylly, *passim*).

Captain William McGeachy Keats retired on 21 February 1860 (London Gazette 22358, 21.2.1860, p 602) and died at his home, Rock Cottage in Llanelli, on 29 November 1873 (Keats family papers).



Letter sent from India by Captain Keats
(Keats family papers)

‡5

Admiral Keats's Watch, presented to him by H.R.H. The Prince Edward, later Duke of Kent and father of Queen Victoria: A gold pair-cased cylinder watch with regulator dial by Josiah Emery, no. 1143, the outer case hallmarked VW incuse for Valentine Walker, London, 1789, with full plate movement, diamond end-stone, cylinder escapement having stop/start facility and pierced and engraved balance cock, signed and numbered *Josiah Emery Charing Cro*ſ*s London 1143* on backplate and on dust-cap; the flat regulator-type white enamel dial with Roman five-minute numerals, minute circle and subsidiary seconds dial with Arabic numerals; the outer case engraved with the initial E and a coronet within Garter and full collar and badge of the Order of St Patrick, inner case engraved with the figure of Hope seated with anchor and the inscription: *Present from H.R.H. Prince Edward to Capt. Keates of the Navy, as a token of his Esteem.*, diameter of outer case 55mm, diameter of dial 44mm, *inner and outer cases both well-worn, enamel dial cracked and second hand replaced but the movement in good and complete original condition;* together with 'Albert' swivel, detached chain and a hardstone fob seal with the Keats crest, *this cracked* £4,000-6,000

Used and cherished by several generations of the Keats family since it was presented to Richard Goodwin Keats in 1790, this good pair-cased English gold watch commemorates a voyage from Portsmouth to Gibraltar in February 1790. As the inscription on its case states, it was given to Keats by His Royal Highness The Prince Edward KG KP, fourth son of King George III and Queen Charlotte.

Prince Edward was born on 2 November 1767. King George, determined that his younger sons should receive a significant portion of their educations in Germany, in 1785 sent Prince Edward to Hanover, at the age of 17, to become a cadet in the Hanoverian Foot Guards. The Prince's experiences in Hanover from 1785 to 1788 were not happy: although educated in a wide variety of subjects, he was kept short of money by his tutor and was exposed to a military discipline which, although he may have emulated it in his subsequent dealings with British military subordinates, he found irksome and oppressive. Moving to Geneva in 1788, he continued his education and fathered two illegitimate children. It is clear from his few surviving letters from the period that he felt himself isolated from and ignored by his parents. This unhappiness led him to leave Geneva precipitately in January 1790 and to return to London; he put up at an hotel, wrote to his elder brothers George and Frederick announcing his arrival, and sought an audience of his father.

The desired audience was short and to the point; Prince Edward was told by his furious father that his conduct was wholly unacceptable and that, as a result, he was to be sent to Gibraltar to serve as a colonel in the garrison there – he was, effectively, to be banished. The King immediately wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty enquiring which of his frigates were ready for sea and, from the two available, selected HMS *SOUTHAMPTON* (32), Captain Richard Goodwin Keats. Whether King George sought the counsel of his sailor son, Prince William Henry, in selecting Keats for the mission is not recorded but, given Prince William's close friendship with, and high regard for, Keats, it is quite conceivable. The Prince had, after all, persuaded his father to promote Keats to post captain as recently as June 1789.

Keats had been commissioned captain of HMS *SOUTHAMPTON* on 22 October 1789 (ADM 9/1). The ship was his first post captain's command and his first command after four-and-a-half years of half pay. Characteristically he immediately inspected his new command in great detail and, equally typically, wrote to the Secretary to the Admiralty that she was in need of docking for the inspection of her coppered bottom, which had been damaged, was foul and which must, therefore, affect her seaworthiness (White, 2005, p 350). The new post captain received short shrift from the Admiralty and *SOUTHAMPTON* was assigned to 'duty frigate' duties based at Portsmouth. In January 1790, she was sent to Plymouth to carry a cargo of specie and was en route back to Spithead when orders from the Admiralty were received by the C. in C. Portsmouth, to stop her at Spithead,

> '...and to cause her Provisions to be completed for Channel Service with all possible dispatch, directing her Commander to hold himself in constant readiness for Sailing...'(ADM 1/995; 19.1.1790).

A week later, while *SOUTHAMPTON* was completing her stores and preparing for sea, the reason for the previous orders arrived in Portsmouth, in the form of a letter sent express from the Admiralty on 27 January and received by C. in C. Portsmouth early in the following morning:

> 'I am to acknowledge the receipt of your Letter by Express at ½ past 6 am with their Lordships orders to Captain Keats to receive His Royal Highness Prince Edward, His Majesty's fourth Son, with His Suite, Attendants and Baggage, on board the Southampton, and carry him and them to Gibraltar; and having landed His Royal Highness, his Suite and Baggage at that place, and received from the Commander in Chief, or the Commanding Officer for the time being, of His Majesty's Ships there, and the Commanding Officer of the Garrison, such dispatches as they may have for England; to make the best of his way back to the Motherbank, and remain there until further orders.' (ADM 1/995; 28.1.1790).

The Admiralty's orders galvanised the naval command in Portsmouth and the imminently expected arrival of the Prince generated flurries of orders for the captains of the ships at Spithead. Keats received his orders direct from the Admiralty: these duplicated those sent to C. in C. Portsmouth but added the vital information that Keats was to ensure that he had acquired an appropriate Royal Standard from naval stores and that it would be hoisted in the correct places on the correct occasions (ADM 80/133). Prince Edward arrived in Portsmouth on Friday 29 January, inspected the Fleet at Spithead and was entertained by the C. in C. On 31 January, his luggage came aboard *SOUTHAMPTON* and on the following day, after due ceremonial leave-taking, he embarked and the frigate immediately made sail, as Keats recorded in his log for Monday 1 February 1790:

> '...at ½ past 3 unmoor'd Ship... at 5 rec'd Fresh Beef; at 6 hove into ⅓ of a Cable on the Best Bower; at 9 Admiral made our signal for a Lieut.; at 10 His Royal Highness came out of the Harbor with the Standard raised in the Barge attended by Admiral Roddam and the Captains of the Men of War and as His Royal Highness passed down the Harbor the Ships were mann'd and he was saluted with 21 Guns by each of the Guardships; and on his approaching Spithead we together with the other men of war at Spithead saluted him with 21 Guns. At 11 mann'd Ship and cheer'd His Royal Highness coming alongside and on his entering the Ship raised the Standard which the men of war at Spithead and in the Harbor saluted as before. Weigh'd and made sail.'(ADM 51/870).

The Prince's 'Suite and Attendants' comprised a total of fourteen men, all of whom were required to be victualled and accommodated for the voyage. While victualling that additional number would not have been difficult or unusual, accommodating such a suite – particularly since few of them could be housed in the forecastle – would have put a definite strain on the very limited accommodation available aboard a frigate. Keats and his officers would have had to relinquish their quarters and the midshipmen and warrant and petty officers would have had, at best, to have shared theirs with some of the Royal party. Sailing time from Spithead to Gibraltar, under optimum sailing conditions and in a fast and seaworthy ship, should have been little more than sixteen to twenty days but Keats's voyage with Prince Edward was to take twenty-four – a trip that might, with a different captain, have tested both the ship's supplies and relationships aboard an overcrowded or unhappy ship.

The cause of the length of the voyage is set out clearly and unmistakeably in the captain's log and confirmed in a letter from Prince Edward to George, Prince of Wales, written shortly after his arrival in Gibraltar. All went well for the first five days of the voyage, although progress down the English Channel was slow because of steady winds from the west and south-west. On 5 February the ship entered an area of unseasonable calm 136 leagues north-east of Cape Finisterre and progress across the Bay of Biscay became unusually slow, with long periods of calm, variable winds and prevalent breezes from the west. The log's repeated references to the shortening and making of sail and to the use of studding sails, top gallants and royals make it clear that not only were Keats and his crew having difficulty in finding much wind but also that that which they *did* find was not always to the ship's advantage. Furthermore the foul state of the old ship's bottom may not have helped in making steerage way. It was not until 17 February that the cliffs of Cape St Vincent were sighted and *SOUTHAMPTON* finally entered Gibraltar Bay on 24 February.

During the voyage Prince Edward was able to experience something of the life of a ship: he would have seen punishment meted out on two occasions, witnessed the 'Great Guns and Small Arms' being exercised almost daily and seen the ship's compasses being checked using both azimuth and amplitude readings. Although the voyage was longer than he might have been expecting there is no evidence to suggest that he found it disagreeable; indeed, as he wrote to The Prince of Wales on 29 February 1790:

> '...I arrived here on Wednesday 24th, after a passage of twenty four days, during the whole of which time we had a constant succession of calms and contrary winds. Our passage would consequently have been excessively tedious had not the continued attentions of Captn. Keates [sic] and all his officers, who assisted us in spending the time as agreeably as possible, prevented us upon the whole from finding it very long. I was also lucky enough not to be sick once during the whole time, which is no small object in so long a passage.' (Aspinall, II, p 66).

This view of the voyage, although more tersely expressed, was confirmed in a letter written from Gibraltar by Prince Edward's temporary ADC, Captain Charles Craufurd, to his brother Robert on 22 March 1790:

> 'We embarked in the 'Southampton' frigate at Portsmouth on 1st February and arrived here on the 24th, in the morning after a very fine passage, tho' long for an English frigate.' (Spurrier, p 239).

Keats's record of the prince's arrival at Gibraltar and disembarkation from his ship is as laconic as befits an entry in a captain's log:

> '[25th February 1790] At 1pm His Royal Highness left the Ship in the Barge with the Standard flying attended by all the Captains. Hauled down the Standard and Hoisted the Pendant. Mann'd Ship, Cheer'd and saluted Him with 21 Guns. ½ pst. 10 the Garrison saluted Him with 21 Guns on his Landing. Empd. Sending His Royal Higness's luggage on shore.' (ADM 51/870)

Although no mention of the presentation of the watch is made in any surviving Keats papers or any letters of Prince Edward, it seems most probable that it was given following a voyage which, for the young prince, was one of banishment but which Captain Keats had done all he could to make as enjoyable and as smooth as possible. There would have been ample time for the Prince to arrange for his new watch to be engraved with the presentation inscription before Keats and H.M.S. *SOUTHAMPTON* left Gibraltar for home on 30 March 1790. In passing it may be noted that 'Keates' is misspelled both in the Prince's letter and on the watch. The *SOUTHAMPTON* arrived back at Spithead shortly before 21 April, whereupon Keats lost no time in drawing the parlous state of his ship to the attention of the acting C. in C. Portsmouth who, just as promptly, copied and forwarded Keats's letter to the Admiralty:

> 'Southampton, Motherbank 21st April 1790.
> Sir, I herewith enclose you the Defects of His Majesty's Ship under my Command and conceive it my duty to observe that those supposed to arise from the Keel have already rendered useless one Cable and considerably damaged another. I have frequently had the Ship swept in order to ascertain the nature of the Defect and have regularly found a something ragged a little before the Chesstree and a Diver who went down purposely to examine it at Gibraltar assur'd me that a part of the False Keel is gone there and that it is otherwise ragged about that place. In addition to this Defect, I beg to observe that the Copper on the Bottom is very foul, and the Decks are in much need of being Caulked, and cannot avoid adding, that if the Services we are to be employed upon will admit I should conceive it adviseable to have her bottom examined. I have the honour to remain, Sir, your most obedient humble servant, R.G. Keats.'(ADM 1/995)

Prince Edward had become a founder Knight of the Order of St. Patrick in 1783 and a Knight of the Order of the Garter in 1786, the insignia of both Orders being portrayed on the outer case of the watch. He was later created Duke of Kent and Strathearn, and Earl of Dublin; he was appointed Governor of Gibraltar in 1802. He married Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld in 1818 and died in 1820. The couple's only child was to become Queen Victoria in 1837.

Stephen Wood MA FSA

END OF SALE

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